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MALAYSIA...Indonesia defend against Malaysia in their South-east Asian Games semi-final

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HOLLAND...The Dutch team celebrate their Women's Euro 2017 victory on a boat along the canals in Utrecht

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FROM THE EDITOR

Looking back over almost 60 years of *World Soccer*, there are many examples of outrage at the latest world-record transfer. Football has a habit of repeating itself; indeed, "Nothing new under the sun" would be a good title for our Archives feature. But there is something altogether different and more troubling about the purchase by Paris Saint-Germain – or rather Qatar – of Neymar, and their attempts to bypass UEFA's Financial Fairplay rules by taking Kylian Mbappe "on loan" from Monaco.

The deals are a grubby landgrab and should surely be challenged by UEFA. But then there is little romance left in the Champions League, which we preview this month (starting page 40). Even the two newcomers to this year's group stage offer little to redress the dominance of wealthy superclubs. Qarabag have heavy backing from a state-owned company in Azerbaijan, while Leipzig are financed the Red Bull drinks company.

> There is something troubling about the purchase by Paris Saint-Germain – or rather Qatar – of Neymar

Unfortunately, the issue of "financial doping" is likely to be one of the themes of the season.

A shame that, once again, money rules our game.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1 PSG swoop for Mbappe p11
2 Champions League draw p40
3 Europa League draw p58
4 Real Madrid win UEFA and Spanish Super Cups p34
5 Wayne Rooney announces international retirement p22
6 FIFA lifts ban on Sudanese teams p74
7 Holland win Women's European Championship p64
8 Salzburg fail to reach Champions League groups again p78
9 Ajax crash out of Champions League and Europa League qualifiers p79
10 Lucescu takes over at Turkey p66

FRANCE

PSG deals blow the market apart

Paris Saint-German followed up signing Neymar from Barcelona and breaking the transfer world record with a "loan" deal to acquire French wonderkid Kylian Mbappe from Ligue 1 champions Monaco.

The structure of the deal – officially a loan until summer 2018 when Qatar-backed PSG will pay Monaco €140m – is designed to bypass UEFA's Financial Fairplay regulations but is bound to attract attention from Europe's governing body over the coming months.

The proposed fee for Mbappe would make the Paris-born teenager the third most expensive player in history – after Neymar and another French youngster, Ousmane Dembele, who moved from Borussia Dortmund to Barcelona in a deal that could be worth €147m with add-ons.

The deal for Dembele was a remarkable piece of business for Dortmund, selling a player bought from Rennes last summer for just €15m. Dembele moved to Barcelona with the Catalan club desperate to rebuild following Neymar's

"We won't be frightened to sanction"

UEFA chief Aleksander Ceferin insists that Financial Fairplay is not dead on the vine

Barca buy...Ousmane Dembele

Talent...Kylian Mbappe

departure. But Barca appeared to have failed with a series of bids for another Brazilian, Philippe Coutinho, who had submitted a transfer request to Liverpool, which was swiftly rejected.

Coutinho was one of a number of high-profile players who looked set for major transfers only for the moves to break down at the 11th hour.

Manchester City's €60m pursuit of Chile forward Alexis Sanchez ended in disappointment after Arsenal failed to complete a proposed €90m move for Monaco midfielder Thomas Lemar as his replacement.

Monaco themselves were turned down by Ajax, who rejected a €50m offer for Danish striker Kasper Dolberg. Nevertheless, the French champions still completed deals worth €102m as they themselved sought replacements for Mbappe, Tiemoue Bakayoko (Chelsea), Bernardo Silva and Benjamin Mendy (both Manchester City). Their signings included Keita Balde (€30m, Lazio) and Youri Tielemans (Anderlecht, €25m) as cash from the Neymar and Mbappe deals trickled down through the European leagues.

A record £1.4billion was spent on transfers by English Premier League clubs, with fees inflated by the Neymar effect and a new domestic television deal.

Summer 2017: the biggest transfer deals *(at 31.08.17)*

€222m	**NEYMAR**	Barcelona, Spa, to Paris Saint-Germain, Fra
€147m	**Ousmane DEMBELE**	Borussia Dortmund, Ger, to Barcelona, Spa
€140m	**Kylian MBAPPE**	Monaco, Fra, to Paris Saint-Germain, Fra*
€85m	**Romelu LUKAKU**	Everton, Eng, to Manchester United, Eng
€65m	**Alvaro MORATA**	Real Madrid, Spa, to Chelsea, Eng
€57.5m	**Benjamin MENDY**	Monaco, Fra, to Manchester City, Eng
€53m	**Alexandre LACAZETTE**	Lyon, Fra, to Arsenal, Eng
€51m	**Kyle WALKER**	Tottenham Hotspur, Eng, to Manchester City, Eng
€50m	**Bernardo SILVA**	Monaco, Fra, to Manchester City, Eng
€49.4m	**Gylfi SIGURDSSON**	Swansea City, Eng, to Everton, Eng
€44.7m	**Nemanja MATIC**	Chelsea, Eng, to Manchester United, Eng
€42m	**Leonardo BONUCCI**	Juventus, Ita, to Milan, Ita
€41.5m	**Corentin TOLISSO**	Lyon, Fra, to Bayern Munich, Ger
€40m	**Tiemoue BAKAYOKO**	Monaco, Fra, to Chelsea, Eng
€40m	**Federico BERNARDESCHI**	Fiorentina, Ita, to Juventus, Ita
€40m	**EDERSON**	Benfica, Por, to Manchester City, Eng
€40m	**PAULINHO**	Guangzhou Evergrande, Chn, to Barcelona, Spa
€40m	**Davinson SANCHEZ**	Ajax, Hol, to Tottenham Hotspur, Eng
€39m	**Mohamed SALAH**	Roma, Ita, to Liverpool, Eng
€38m	**Andre SILVA**	Porto, Por, to Milan, Ita
€38m	**Danny DRINKWATER**	Leicester City, Eng, to Chelsea, Eng
€38m	**Alex OXLADE-CHAMBERLAIN**	Arsenal, Eng, to Liverpool, Eng
€36m	**VITOLO**	Sevilla, Spa, to Atletico Madrid, Spa
€35m	**Victor LINDELOF**	Benfica, Por, to Manchester United, Eng
€35m	**Anthony MODESTE**	Cologne, Ger, to Tianjin Quanjian, Chn
€35m	**Antonio RUDIGER**	Roma, Ita, to Chelsea, Eng
€30m	**Keita BALDE**	Lazio, Ita, to Monaco, Fra
€30m	**DANILO**	Real Madrid, Spa, to Manchester City, Eng
€30m	**Theo HERNANDEZ**	Atletico Madrid, Spa, to Real Madrid, Spa
€30m	**Nelson SEMEDO**	Benfica, Por, to Barcelona, Spa
€29m	**Jordan PICKFORD**	Sunderland, Eng, to Everton, Eng
€28.5m	**Michael KEANE**	Burnley, Eng, to Everton, Eng
€28.2m	**Mamadou SAKHO**	Liverpool, Eng, to Crystal Palace, Eng
€28m	**Davide ZAPPACOSTA**	Torino, Ita, to Chelsea, Eng
€27.7m	**Kelechi IHEANACHO**	Manchester City, Eng, to Leicester City, Eng
€27m	**Davy KLAASSEN**	Ajax, Hol, to Everton, Eng
€25m	**Serge AURIER**	Paris Saint-Germain, Fra, to Tottenham, Eng
€25m	**Andrey YARMOLENKO**	Dynamo Kiev, Ukr, to Borussia Dortmund, Ger
€24m	**Hakan CALHANOGLU**	Bayer Leverkusen, Ger, to Milan, Ita
€24m	**Andrea CONTI**	Atalanta, Ita, to Milan, Ita
€24m	**Matias VECINO**	Fiorentina, Ita, to Internazionale, Ita
€23m	**Leandro PAREDES**	Roma, Ita, to Zenit, Rus
€23m	**Milan SKRINIAR**	Sampdoria, Ita to Internazionale, Ita
€23m	**Youri TIELEMANS**	Anderlecht, Blg, to Monaco, Fra
€22.8m	**Nathan AKE**	Chelsea, Eng, to Bournemouth, Eng
€22.3m	**Marko ARNAUTOVIC**	Stoke City, Eng, to West Ham United, Eng
€21m	**Kingsley COMAN**	Juventus, Ita, to Bayern Munich, Ger
€20m	**John Anthony BROOKS**	Hertha Berlin, Ger, to Wolfsburg, Ger
€20m	**Juan CUADRADO**	Chelsea, Eng, to Juventus, Ita
€20m	**DALBERT**	Nice, Fra, to Internazionale, Ita
€20m	**Andre GRAY**	Burnley, Eng, to Watford, Eng
€20m	**Harry MAGUIRE**	Hull City, Eng, to Leicester City, Eng
€20m	**Kevin KAMPL**	Leverkusen, Ger, to RB Leipzig, Ger
€20m	**Nikola MAKSIMOVIC**	Torino, Ita, to Napoli, Ita
€20m	**Blaise MATUIDI**	Paris Saint-Germain, Fra, to Juventus, Ita
€20m	**Luis MURIEL**	Sampdoria, Ita, to Sevilla, Spa
€20m	**Maximilian PHILIPP**	Freiburg, Ger, to Borussia Dortmund, Ger
€20m	**Niklas SULE**	Hoffenheim, Ger, to Bayern Munich, Ger
€20m	**Oliver TORRES**	Atletico Madrid, Spa, to Porto, Por

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"He is very humble and takes everything with ease. It's soon to say about the Ballon d'Or, but I think so"

Lucas Vazquez (left) on team-mate Marco Asensio's future prospects

Marco ASENSIO (Real Madrid)

The 21-year-old midfielder staked his claim for a starting place this season with match-winning performances in the Spanish Super Cup against Barcelona. He scored in both legs, including an astonishing volley in the second game. His goal in the first leg continued his remarkable record of scoring on his debut in every competition for Madrid.

"It's only a useful tool if it's used sparingly. In football, not every contact in the box is a penalty"

Juventus keeper Gianluigi Buffon says VAR decision-making is a "monster"

Donny VAN DE BEEK
(Ajax)
The highly rated 20-year-old midfielder was called up to the senior Holland squad for the first time.

Nuri SAHIN
(Borussia Dortmund)
After a number of seasons on the sidelines, the midfielder is back to top form in the Bundesliga.

Holger BADSTUBER
(Stuttgart)
The injury-plagued former Bayern Munich defender scored his first goal in eight years playing for new club Stuttgart.

Mauro ICARDI
(Internazionale)
The Argentinian struck twice as Inter came from behind to beat Roma.

David VILLA
(New York City)
The veteran striker was recalled to the Spain squad for the first time in three years.

Patrick CUTRONE
(Milan)
Amid all the new arrivals at San Siro since the arrival of the club's new Chinese owners, Milan found a new young goalscorer in this 19-year-old academy product.

Robin VAN PERSIE
(Fenerbahce)
The 34-year-old was recalled by Holland. "He has struggled with his fitness of late, but if you use him in the right way, you will see his qualities," said national coach Dick Advocaat.

HEROES & VILLAINS

Charitable effort...Juan Mata

JUAN MATA
The Manchester United midfielder launched a campaign to persuade his fellow professionals to follow his example and donate one per cent of their income to charity.

SAMANTHA KERR
Became the first player in America's NWSL to score more than three goals in a game when she scored four times in the first half of Sky Blue's 5-4 win against Seattle Reign.

ANTOINE GRIEZMANN
The French forward was persuaded to stay at Atletico Madrid and admitted it would be "a blow" to leave after the club's transfer ban was upheld.

DINO NDLOVU
Scored the away goal that secured victory over Copenhagen and sealed Qarabag's place in the Champions League group stage – a first for a team from Azerbaijan.

Historic goal... Dino Ndlovu

EDGAR DAVIDS & PATRICK KLUIVERT
The former Holland internationals joined Zimbabwe president Robert Mugabe on stage at a political rally, drawing criticism from opponents.

Political statement...Edgar Davids (left) and Patrick Kluivert

SERGIO RAMOS
His red card in Real Madrid's opening game of the season, a 3-0 victory over Deportivo La Coruna, was his 18th in La Liga – equalling the competition record held by former Barcelona and Sevilla defender Pablo Alfaro and ex-Real Zaragoza centre-back Xavi Aguado.

Off...Sergio Ramos raises his hand and sees red – again

CRISTIANO RONALDO
Was banned for five games following his shove on the referee during the first leg of Real Madrid's Spanish Super Cup win against Barcelona.

RICARDO VELAZCO
The Real Salt Lake striker was banned from all football-related activity, while investigations are ongoing, after being charged with unlawful sexual activity with a 15-year-old earlier this year.

"His strike took him where he wanted. In the interest of clean football, such behaviour should not be rewarded"

Former Bayern Munich director of sport Matthias Sammer slams the strong-arm transfer tactics of new Barcelona recruit Ousmane Dembele

GOALS we'd like to see again

1 NIKLAS BENDTNER
Rosenborg v Molde
A first-time shot with the outside of his right foot that curls inside the far post.

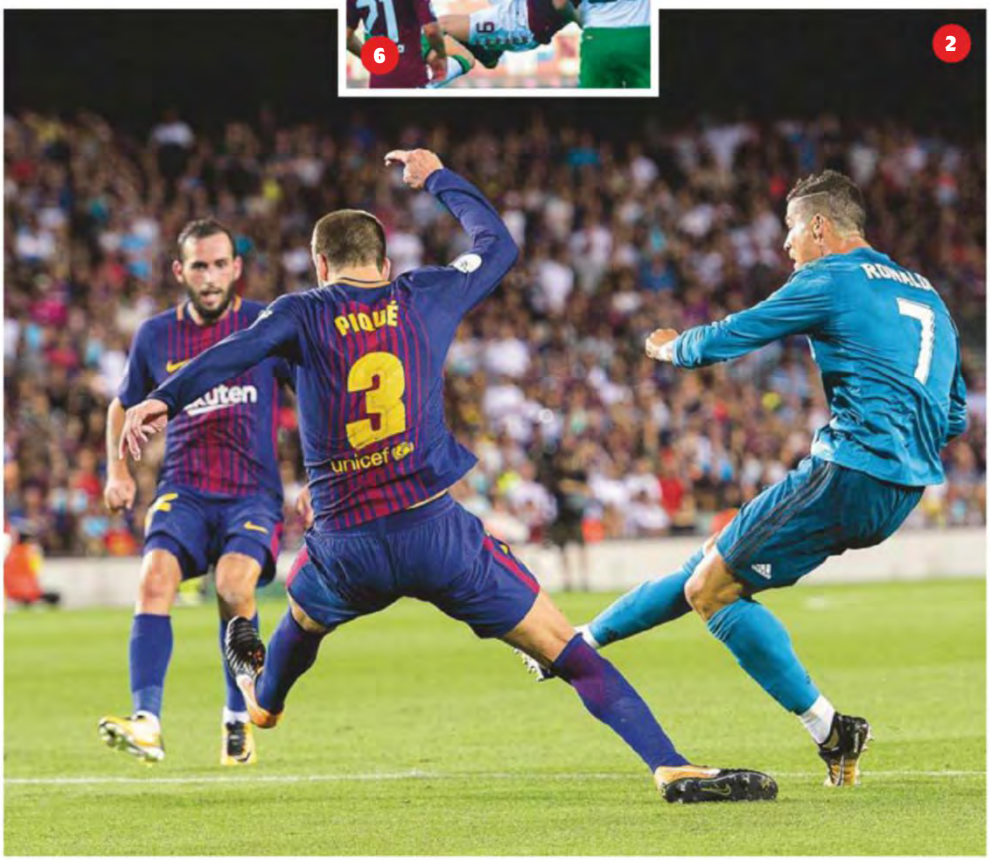
2 CRISTIANO RONALDO
Real Madrid v Barcelona
Chests the ball to Isco, receives the return pass and cuts inside Gerard Pique before curling a right-foot shot into the far corner.

3 ANTHONY NWAKAEME
Hapoel Be'er Sheva v Maribor
Meets a dropping ball on the volley from the edge of the area.

4 CRISTIAN PELLERANO
Veracruz v Pachuca
After a lovely turn from Daniel Villalba, his drag-back wrong-foots his marker and he fires high into the goal.

5 RADAMEL FALCAO
Monaco v Marseille
Reacts superbly with a diving header as the ball is deflected off a team-mate.

6 ANDREA BELOTTI
Torino v Sassuolo
Spectacular scissor kick following a right-wing cross from Lorenzo De Silvestri.



WINNERS

HERACLES
Beat Ajax on the opening day of the season to record their first win against the Amsterdam club since 1965.

QARABAG
Victory over Copenhagen meant they are the first Azeri club to reach the Champions League group stage.

MARCO BORRIELLO
His goal for SPAL against Udinese equalled Nicola Amoruso's record of scoring for 12 different clubs in Serie A.

LOSERS

CORINTHIANS
A 1-0 loss to Vitoria ended a run of 34 games unbeaten in all competitions – three shy of their club's record.

AJAX
Last season's beaten Europa League finalists were eliminated before this season's group stage.

RED BULL SALZBURG
The Austrian champions missed out on the Champions League group stage for a 10th year in a row.

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

Bonucci is the transfer deal of the summer, not Neymar

A monstrous fee of €222million marked out the most expensive transfer of this summer and of all time. And while it will surely weigh heavy on the shimmying shoulders and dancing feet of Neymar, its ramifications will also certainly cascade through the world of soccer. And not in a good way – as the inflated transfer fees being quoted to potential buyers since then have illustrated.

Neymar's switch was, of course, the most talked about of the latest transfer window. How could it not be in its extravagance, its controversy and its sheer folly? But the best deal of the summer? Well, that's another matter, and judgement will have to wait for the season's conclusion in May, with national titles and the Champions League.

Maybe it will be Bayern Munich capturing the gossamer talent of James Rodriguez on loan. Maybe it will be Manchester City buying themselves a reliable goalkeeper. Maybe it will be one of those high-profile strikers bought for a gigantic fee, such as Alvaro Morata going to Chelsea.

However, none of these transfers, not even that of Neymar, is actually the most fascinating of this summer.

The most compelling deal was the one that took Italy's incomparably brilliant defender Leonardo Bonucci from Juventus along the short autostrada drive to Milan.

Bonucci was coveted across the continent despite being 30 years of age – not least by Pep Guardiola, who is desperate to find a formidable central defender for Manchester City. The player would have been snapped up without hesitation by Chelsea and others too, as nobody baulked at the fee of €42m for a champion performer at the heart of Juve's domination of Serie A in recent times.

Yet, almost the last place anybody thought he would go to was Milan, who have been a shadow of their former glorious selves for the past few seasons, with their muddling mediocrity often seeing them failing to even qualify for the Europa League.

Surely this was a backward step, the kind of move a player makes only when he is winding down his career but can still command one last, lucrative contract?

> The day that Bonucci joined was the day Milan started to believe again

But that is not Bonucci. He may have fallen out with Juventus coach Massimilano Allegri but he had complete choice about his future.

Of course money talked in this transfer – let's be honest, it always does – but so did the revived ambition of Milan under their new Chinese owners, who finally clinched full control of the club in April.

Ramifications ...Neymar

By the middle of August, and with trading not yet complete, Milan had a net expenditure of some €170m on new players. So while some may have doubted the vision of chairman Li Yonghong, the optimism was already flooding into the San Siro when Bonucci signed up for the adventure.

Perhaps in Italy, more than anywhere else, acquiring the best defender in the world, is the defining statement of intent: a badge of honour for crowing fans.

Milan supporters liked the look of other arrivals as well, notably the dynamic central midfielder Franck Kessie from Atalanta and striker Andre Silva from Porto. They also enjoyed the speculation about such talents as veteran Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

But the day that Bonucci joined was the day they started to believe again.

Milan's fall from grace has been long and hard – a road far more rocky than that travelled by Manchester United since the retirement of Alex Ferguson.

This is a club that has won seven European Cups and been in the Final 11 times. Only Real Madrid can boast a superior record on either count. Yet in the past four seasons in Serie A, Milan have finished sixth, seventh, 10th and eighth – a catalogue of catastrophe.

They had not set their sights on Bonucci; they had not been looking so high. But when the player's agent suggested that such a move might be possible, Milan moved with swift assurance to complete the most unlikely and the most interesting transfer of this spendthrift football summer. WS

Incomparable...Leonardo Bonucci had his pick of Europe's biggest clubs on leaving Juventus and chose Milan

Jonathan WILSON

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Return of the pragmatists

It's very easy, perhaps particularly so in a world in which everybody always has to have an opinion on everything, to be seduced by novelty, to believe that what has just happened has changed the world forever, that a recent innovation is the new normal.

When Pep Guardiola was dominating at Barcelona, preaching the doctrine of *juego de posicion*, it seemed both thrillingly radical and at the same time a logical evolution of the style of football Johan Cruyff had laid down as the Barca blueprint in the early 1990s.

For a while, probably until Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund counter-attacked their way to victory over Barcelona and Real Madrid in the Champions League semi-finals in 2013, possession was king. Football, for a brief while, became all about either winning and retaining the ball, or working out how to play against that. But Guardiola changed football in another way as well: he made it seem as though all managers had to have a philosophy.

This focus on philosophy changed the discourse around football and was perhaps aided, in the UK at least, by the changing demographics of supporters and how the game is now consumed.

Football is no longer simply something to be watched on a Saturday afternoon after a couple of pints and before a few more. It is something to be pored over relentlessly with the aid of an increasingly sophisticated slew of data. The conversation around football has become far more abstract and that in turn leads inevitably to theorising.

Pressing game... Borussia Dortmund swarm around Wolfsburg's Landry Dimata

> Pep Guardiola changed football... he made it seem as though all managers had to have a philosophy

When the hegemony of possession football ended – symbolically at least – in those semi-finals in 2013, it seemed initially that there was a new dominant philosophy: that of *gegenpressing*. However, to suggest that *gegenpressing* simply supplanted *juego de posicion* is misleading, not least because they cannot be set in opposition to each other.

Gegenpressing is based on winning the ball back quickly after it is lost, as high up the pitch as possible, but that was always a feature of Guardiola's Barcelona who employed a "three-second rule" – which is to say, when the ball was lost they would look to win the ball back within three seconds, reasoning that within that period the opposing player who had made the tackle or interception would be off-balance and may not have a precise mental image of the distribution of other players on the field, making it harder for him to select a pass to evade the press.

If the ball wasn't won back within those three seconds, the Barca team would look to drop back into a more defensive structure.

But when current Borussia Dortmund boss Peter Bosz tried to introduce "a five-second rule" at Ajax last season, there was criticism from the Cruyffians.

Gegenpressing, therefore, is perhaps more concerned with winning the ball back than with retaining it. But although it is a style based more on physicality than deft technique, it cannot be set up in opposition to *juego de posicion*. It certainly is not as obviously contrary to Guardiola's model as the approach of, say, Jose Mourinho.

In certain key games, Mourinho will have his side sitting deep and effectively encouraging the opposition to have the ball in the firm belief that's it's with the ball that a player is more likely to make a mistake.

So what, then, is the dominant philosophy of the present era?

It would be easy to be cynical and say that the pre-eminent mode is simply being rich. Certainly it would be hard to deny that the reason for the domination of Bayern Munich, Juventus and, last season excepted, Paris Saint-Germain in their domestic leagues is their resources rather than

Three seconds... Barcelona's Xavi (left) and Andres Iniesta close down Karim Benzema of Real Madrid

any tactical genius.

That superiority perhaps facilitated Guardiola's idealism in Germany, but it's notable how in England where Manchester City, for all their wealth are not a lone superpower, he has had to compromise.

The case of Real Madrid is a little different. Over the past three to four years they have shifted from a *galactico* model to buying up young Spanish talent and the result is that, as Gerard Pique noted, for the first time in a decade they are clearly superior to Barca.

Some doubts remain about Zinedine Zidane as a tactician, rooted largely in that run of games last season in which Madrid, unable to control matches, kept falling behind. While clearly an excellent politician – and it may be that that is more useful to a team of that level – what he is certainly not is a philosopher, and neither are Carlo Ancelotti, Antonio Conte, Leonardo Jardim or Max Allegri, the four other winners of Europe's big five leagues last season.

After the years of radical innovation led by Guardiola, it feels as though football has returned to a more pragmatic model. There is less fundamentalism, less idealism than there was, but perhaps that's always been the way after revolution.

In time, the grand ideas fall away and people get on with making the best of a slightly altered environment, winning football matches by the best means they can. WS

Football philosopher...Pep Guardiola

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

1 POLDI'S JET-SKI ANGER

World Cup-winner Lukas Podolski, who played 130 times for Germany, has threatened to take legal action after his photo was used by a website for an article about illegal immigration.

The 32-year-old, who plays for Japanese side Vissel Kobe, was featured by Breitbart under the headline: "Spanish Police Crack Gang Moving Migrants on Jet-Skis."

The website later changed the picture and claimed: "A previous version of this story included an image of Lukas Podolski on a jet ski. This image appeared as an illustration of a person on a jet ski."

It went on to say: "There is no evidence Mr Podolski is either a migrant gang member, nor being human trafficked."

Legal action... Lukas Podolski

to an airport to catch a flight.

The man in the middle played just 40 minutes in the first half and then blew his whistle after 38 minutes of the second period before rushing off to jump on a plane. His excuse was that there is only one scheduled flight a day from the airport nearest to the club where he was officiating.

Injury...Usain Bolt at the world championships

2 BUYING BOLT FOR BEER AND BURGERS

Newly retired 100m and 200m world-record holder Usain Bolt has been offered the chance to play football for Portuguese club Beira-Mar – who say they will pay the 31-year-old Jamaican in burgers and beer.

The club says that Bolt would love playing in front of "the best fans in the world". However, the hamstring injury that ended his IAAF World Championships looks set to require around three months' rehabilitation and that will put any potential football career on hold.

Wages...Beira-Mar's offer

3 TIME FLIES IN CHINA

A league game between Hangzhou Greentown's reserve side and Meixian Techand in China was cut short by the referee because he needed to get

Out...Nicolai Muller

4 CELEBRATION CUT SHORT

There will be no more extravagant goal celebrations for Hamburg's Nicolai Muller.

After scoring his side's winner against Augsburg on the opening weekend of the Bundesliga season, the 29-year-old striker unwisely attempted a complicated gymnastic manoeuvre and collided with the corner flag.

The net result? He was carried off with ruptured cruciate ligaments in his right knee and will be sidelined for seven months.

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Only Abo Rida remains from 2010 FIFA ExCo

And then there was one. Egypt's Hany Abo Rida is now the only surviving member of the FIFA Council who was in the old executive committee on December 2, 2010 – the day Sepp Blatter and his merry men voted the 2018 World Cup to Russia and 2022 to Qatar.

Abo Rida was left with this singular status – one can hardly call it "honour" – after Angel Maria Villar resigned from his vice-presidency of both FIFA and UEFA following his arrest in Spain on corruption charges.

Villar's fall was dramatic. The former Athletic Bilbao and Spain midfielder had been re-elected in May as president of the Spanish federation (RFEF) for a further four-year term which would have taken him into a remarkable fourth decade.

Football's status in Spain had placed Villar and the RFEF above even the country's National Sports Council and he had seen off various council chairmen who had dared to try to clip his wings.

Around world football's top table Villar was not merely a fixture but an arrogant one, refusing to engage with the media and fulminating against critics who dared to suggest that all was not well in the corridors of power.

He was rapped over the knuckles by the FIFA ethics committee for not co-operating with Michael Garcia's investigation into the 2018/2022 fiasco – not that Villar or anyone in Spain took any notice. Villar carried on as normal even after publication of Garcia's report, with its verbatim description of the two men's acerbic exchange.

Villar took his cue from Julio Grondona, Ricardo Teixeira, Nicolas Leoz and Eugenio Figueredo, the South American football dictators who fed off the game's commercial bonanza. They were family, literally, as Villar's lawyer son Gorka was legal director and then general secretary of CONMEBOL during the final years of "The Great Rip-off".

Survivor...Hany Abo Rida

According to Madrid court documentation, Villar Snr, his son and two other senior Spanish officials were detained on allegations concerning misuse of authority and fraud. Initially Villar was denied bail on the grounds that he was so rich he was a flight risk. Later he was allowed out on payment of a bail bond of €300,000 and the surrender of his passport.

Gorka was freed after paying a deposit of a mere €150,000. He would have had no problem finding the bail bond, if court papers are to be believed, as it is alleged that his company earned more than €500,000 through contracts linked to friendlies played by Spain's national team – which were, of course, conveniently awarded on the ultimate authority of his father.

Villar made one of his longer press statements on walking out of the Soto del Real prison, saying: "I want to thank all the people who have privately and publicly supported us. I also acknowledge the other prisoners for their response to us. I hope they're successful in their own legal actions and are with us back on the streets."

Being free, Villar can work hard on his own defence and seeking favours of support among all his place-men in the federation.

Not only is he out but he is not down yet, either.

Triumphant Dutch still face uphill struggle

The orange banner was specific and timely, reading: "Who needs Neymar? We have Lieke."

To the uninitiated the message was obscure, but to every fan in Holland it was crystal clear: the Brazilian, whatever his high-profile sale value, came a poor second to another Barcelona player in the eyes of Dutch fans.

Lieke Martens, a quick intelligent outside-left, was named the best player of the European Women's Championship in Holland and scored one of the hosts' goals in their 4-2 victory over Denmark in the Final.

Dutch fans took the tournament to their hearts, inspired by the success of a team drawn from clubs not only at home but also in England, Spain and Germany. They were comfortably the best football-playing team on show. England, third at the 2015 World Cup, were physically efficient but were outplayed by the Dutch in the semi-finals.

One of the most positive outcomes for the tournament was the inscription of a name other than Germany on the trophy. The Germans had won the last six Euros, but under new coach Steffi Jones they were disjointed. Even captain Dzsenifer Marozsan failed to impose herself in a reconstructed team.

The women's game has a long way to go and it is wrong to pursue too many comparisons with men's football. Arnold Muhren, a Euro winner in 1988, fell into that trap with a disparaging comment similar to John McEnroe's dismissal, in the tennis context, of Serena Williams.

Minke Booij, a former Olympic hockey gold medallist, believes the problem remains cultural. Boss of the women's football division at the Dutch federation (KNVB) for the past two years, she summed up her frustrations with the comment: "Football structures were created by men, for men".

On taking up her post, Booij had not been impressed when a member of the KNVB board suggested painting her office building pink. No wonder she is off to a new role in the charity sector.

The Dutch players at Euro 2017 took significant strides forward, but a vast amount of work remains to be done...and not only in Holland.

Winners... Holland's women

Pressure...referee Danny Makkelie

Video refs need time

The flaws of the video assistant referee system that were so evident at this summer's Confederations Cup, in terms of communication and time lag, were underscored in Holland recently at the season-opening Super Cup.

During the game, referee Danny Makkelie turned down a penalty appeal from Vitesse and let play run on until Feyenoord increased their single-goal lead to 2-0 on the counter-attack.

Only when play stopped "naturally" did Makkelie consult his video assistant, after which the goal was ruled out and Vitesse awarded a penalty – from which they equalised.

The match finished 1-1 and Feyenoord went on to win on penalties, but imagine that in the World Cup Final next year...

The rush to shower the game with fancy new ideas for the sake of it is to be deplored and FIFA president Gianni Infantino is hell-bent on rolling out video refereeing at next year's World Cup, ready or not.

As Arthur Rowe, Tottenham Hotspur's push-and-run manager at the turn of the 1950s, once said: "Football is a simple game, it's players who make it complicated."

Make that self-justifying officials.

"I am not saying buy 10 players. I'd love to see two or three – and not players you have to Google and say, 'Who's that?'"

Tottenham Hotspur's Danny Rose offers his club some transfer advice

HEADLINER: Paulinho

Barca shop in China

Brazilian's move demonstrates the rise of the Chinese Super League

Guangzhou Evergrande may already be missing Paulinho but even fans of the Chinese Super League champions see that the Brazilian's move to Barcelona marks a significant step in recognition for the country's domestic club scene.

Not that they wanted to sell him. "Guangzhou Evergrande Football Club remain resolute in our transfer plan of Paulinho," read a club statement in July. "We will never sell him mid-season."

Tottenham Hotspur followers may have been surprised when Barca paid €40m for a player who struggled in London from 2013 to 2015, but the 29-year-old's transfer was well received in China.

"Because Paulinho has come here and done ever so well, now he has a transfer to one of the biggest clubs in the world," says Andre Villas-Boas, Shanghai SIPG coach and once boss of Spurs.

"I think it shows that the big clubs are also looking at our league. It's a reflection of the players and the quality of work that is being done here."

This echoes similar sentiments expressed by players and coaches around the league. The country's president, Xi Jinping, must also have allowed himself a smile of satisfaction, having made it clear that he wants China to become a powerhouse in football.

So the sight of one of the biggest clubs in the world having to pay big money – around three times what Guangzhou Evergrande paid Spurs 26 months earlier – to a Chinese team was warmly welcomed, as was Paulinho's goodbye gesture of giving away a car to the team's supporters.

There was also some satisfaction among rival fans that the club that started the spending spree in 2010, hoovering up the best domestic players and winning the league every year since, were being relieved of their best player.

Paulinho has been the best player in China, and probably even all of Asia, over the past two years. A return of 25 goals in 95 games does not tell the full story of how influential he was, giving Luiz Felipe Scolari's team authority and power in the middle and a presence, often arriving late, in the opposition penalty area.

He helped the side to two Chinese Super League titles and victory in the 2015 Asian Champions League. When he left, the team were clear at the top of the table in China and in the last eight of the Champions League, although a week after his departure they lost 4-0 to Shanghai SIPG in the first leg of their quarter-final. He was badly missed and Guangzhou Evergrande do not have a replacement.

As good as Paulinho has been in China, his greatest assist could come off the pitch. The Chinese Super League has money but not yet the worldwide respect it craves. Players who go there are often derided for a lack of ambition, yet Paulinho has shown that this is no semi-retirement home.

Having not represented his country since the 2014 World Cup, Paulinho was called-up again in 2016 after Brazil's inconsistent start to qualification for the 2018 tournament. The *Selecao* won their next eight games – he missed one through suspension – and became the first team to reach Russia.

> "It shows that the big clubs are also looking at our league. It's a reflection of the players and the quality of work that is being done here"
>
> Shanghai SIPG coach Andre Villas-Boas on Paulinho's move to Europe

Excellent throughout the campaign, his high point came in March when, a goal down in Uruguay, he scored a hat-trick to secure victory.

Paulinho has been lining up in midfield for his country alongside Renato Augusto of Beijing Guoan, and to have a Chinese-based Brazilian midfield would have been inconceivable until very recently.

If Brazil can have success with a Chinese midfield and Paulinho can rebuild a career to go to the very pinnacle of the European game then, perhaps, the Chinese Super League is not that bad after all and perhaps money is not the temptation.

Paulinho did plenty in his 26 months in China but his biggest achievement may be yet to come. Barcelona will certainly have a few more fans in China, willing the Brazilian on.

John Duerden

Nou boy...Paulinho

"He says I'm not focused enough at the moment. I've no idea what he means"

Radja Nainggolan slams national coach Roberto Martinez for leaving him out of the Belgium squad

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Appointments, sackings and loans

IN

In charge at Hearts... Craig Levein

Watching brief...Steve McClaren

EUROPE

STEVE McCLAREN joined Israeli club Maccabi Tel Aviv as a consultant, working with Jordi Cruyff – who was a player at Manchester United when the ex-England boss was Alex Ferguson's assistant.

Former Crystal Palace player and manager **DOUGIE FREEDMAN** returned as sporting director.

Hearts director of football **CRAIG LEVEIN** replaced Ian Cathro as the Scottish side's manager.

Off to Sofia...Delio Rossi

Rossi takes Levski job

Former Lazio boss **DELIO ROSSI** took charge of Levski Sofia, replacing Nikolay Mitov who left by mutual consent after the Bulgarian side were knocked out of the Europa League qualifiers.

SOUTH AMERICA

REINALDO RUEDA, who led Colombian club Atletico Nacional to victory in the Libertadores Cup last year, replaced Ze Ricardo as coach of Brazilian side Flamengo.

CONCACAF

Mexico international **CARLOS VELA** has agreed to join new MLS franchise Los Angeles FC from Real Sociedad in January.

USA winger **PAUL ARRIOLA** joined DC United from Club Tijuana of Mexico for an initial fee of $3m, which is a record transfer paid by an MLS club for an American player aged under 23.

AFRICA

Serbian **MILUTIN "MICHO" SREDOJEVIC**, who terminated his contract as Uganda's national team boss over unpaid wages, joined Orlando Pirates a week later for a second spell in charge of the South African club, replacing Swedish coach Kjell Jonevret.

Egyptian club Zamalek appointed Montenegrin **NEBOJSA JOVOVIC** as coach, replacing Portugal's Augusto Inacio, who was dismissed in July after less than four months in charge.

ASIA

Without a club since leaving LA Galaxy in November, the Republic of Ireland's all-time record goalscorer **ROBBIE KEANE** joined Indian Super League champions Atletico de Kolkata, who are currently coached by his former Tottenham Hotspur team-mate Teddy Sheringham.

Bulgaria's all-time leading scorer **DIMITAR BERBATOV** joined Indian Super League side Kerala Blasters, where he linked up with his former Manchester United team-mate Wes Brown.

Brazilian job...Reinaldo Rueda

OUT

Gone...Pablo Mastroeni

EUROPE

England's all-time record goalscorer **WAYNE ROONEY**, who scored 53 times in 119 games, retired from international football aged 31.

CONCACAF

Colorado Rapids fired coach **PABLO MASTRONI** with the team sitting 10th in the MLS Western Conference.

Mexican side Pumas dismissed boss **FRANCISCO PALENCIA** after a 2-1 loss to Morelia.

Lost...Francisco Palencia

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Rooney: a great talent that was never truly fulfilled

It was a bitter irony that Wayne Rooney's salient international career moment was frustrated by a crude Portuguese tackle in the 2004 European Championship quarter-finals in Lisbon. Till then Rooney seemed to be reaching the crescendo of his talent; the greatest seen of an English player since the doomed Paul Gascoigne.

Now, with a record number of goals and a great profusion of caps, he has decided to retire from international football, returning to his local Everton team for which he had once been a sensationally precocious debutant. He had been only 16 when coming on at Goodison Park as a substitute against Arsenal and winning the match with a shot of phenomenal power and accuracy.

Sven Goran Eriksson, then England's manager, ignored the cautious pleas of the Everton manager David Moyes and picked Rooney as a 17-year-old, first as a substitute against Australia and tiny Liechtenstein, then in a European qualifier against Turkey.

For much of that game England were having very much the worst of it against a gifted Turkish side and were holding out with difficulty. It was Rooney who transformed things, not only as a striker but as an inspiration in midfield, winning the ball, sometimes even juggling with it, transforming an England team which ended with a 2-0 victory. Rooney went on to play splendidly in the finals the following year, the motor and architect of the English side, head and shoulders above every other England player, though even he could not save them in their opener against France when Eriksson's negative tactics proved fatal. Against Switzerland, Rooney became the youngest player, at 18 years and seven months, to score in a European finals when he headed a goal. He would score again afterwards, remarking modestly: "I just go out to do well for the team."

Against Croatia he scored two more goals, which made Croatian coach Otto Baric remark: "A very good player but not a phenomenon. There are at least 10 players in Europe who can stop him" – to which Eriksson rejoined: "I don't know who they are." He then added Portugal wouldn't want him as opposition in the quarter-final. But Portugal it would be and Rooney, alas, was doomed.

In Lisbon after 27 minutes Rooney, already in fine form, was kicked in a tackle by Jorge Andrade and left the field with a broken bone in his foot. England would eventually succumb on penalties.

This was arguably the apex of Rooney's international career although there were so many caps and goals to follow. In Germany in the 2006 tournament he was shamefully exploited by Eriksson. Still recovering from a metatarsal injury, it had been assumed by his United manager Alex Ferguson that were he to play at all it would be only at the second stage of the tournament. Instead Eriksson irresponsibly threw him into England's game against Trinidad & Tobago in

Unstoppable... Rooney celebrates scoring against Croatia at Euro 2004

Sent off...Rooney stamps on Ricardo Carvalho at the 2006 World Cup

Nuremberg. He came on for the last half hour. Against Sweden, Rooney lasted for 69 minutes largely marked by frustration. One saw the real gifted Rooney in the subsequent game versus Ecuador, in which he lasted the full match despite being alone up front.

So to the quarter-final against Portugal in which Rooney, alas perhaps predictably and inevitably, finally did explode. He would last just an hour. Provoked by the Portuguese centre-back Ricardo Carvalho, he stamped on his opponent's groin and off he went.

Later, in a bad tempered game in the Balkans, he would get himself expelled again, against Montenegro, and missed a couple of matches in the subsequent European finals. Of his tremendous talents there was never any doubt, but he was hardly a role model on or off the field for aspiring youngsters.

Complaint...England's Eni Aluko insisted she suffered racial discrimination

The Eni Aluko mystery

The case of the much-capped England women's international Eni Aluko, the sister of the gifted Reading striker Sone Aluko, continues to perplex me. Two investigations committees, one headed by a black female barrister, have rejected her insistence that she has suffered racist discrimination. Yet the Football Association has reportedly given her £80,000, with vague explanations which seemed on the face of it to amount to no more than wanting to calm the waters.

But even in these hyperbolic times that is a lot of money and suggests that Ms Aluko indeed has or had a case. As a token gesture, £80,000 does seem significant, but if you cannot make head or tail of it, nor can I.

Board to blame for De Boer crisis

Is Frank De Boer already in peril after Crystal Palace's dire start to the season? His attempt to change the team's style to a more sophisticated possession kind hasn't worked, but whose fault is that?

When Palace appointed him manager, surely they had examined his preferred tactics, which worked at Ajax but hardly in Italy at Inter, where he was brusquely dismissed. A manager must cut his coat according to his cloth and it is palpable that De Boer hasn't done that.

But who is to blame? Hardly the players, who have been used to a more direct style. De Boer himself? Yet he has made no secret of the kind of tactics he prefers. The Palace board? Guilty as charged I would say, for they do not seem to have done their homework. Or if they had, have failed to draw the proper inference.

Meanwhile, I remain baffled by the withdrawal from management of Sam Allardyce. He may be a controversial figure, but in his last spell at Palace he certainly didn't seem to have lost his managerial competence and drive.

Agony...Frank De Boer (centre)

Wenger cannot continue with this shambles

The thrashing Arsenal endured at Anfield against a Liverpool team without its star turn Philippe Coutinho brought starkly into focus the question of why they clung on to Arsene Wenger as their manager. The past three seasons had all been deeply disappointing, despite FA Cup Final success, and the two 5-1 thrashings by Bayern Munich in last season's European Cup surely told a tale of managerial failure.

Indeed, for the first time in so many years, the Gunners failed to reach even fourth place in the Premiershp, meaning that they were consigned to the secondary European competition.

Last May, in a defiant interview, Wenger ridiculed the idea that a director of football should be placed alongside him. He proclaimed that he and he alone should be in charge. A docile board, defying the demands of thousands of the club's own fans, duly gave him another two-year contract.

When Liverpool walked all over Arsenal at Anfield, a team which for all its prowess in attack had been criticised for its failings in defence, the Gunners could not even muster a shot on goal. The belated return of Alexis Sanchez was of negligible value; he would be substituted after an anaemic display.

By one of the ironies common in football, and goodness knows I have been subject to them myself, Aaron Ramsey, the team's Welsh international midfielder, had given a long Sunday interview in which he had eulogised the club's use of a three-at-the-back formation. In the event, the Gunners' defence looked pitifully porous while Ramsey himself was over-run in midfield.

Arsenal's passive board have brought all this on themselves. Having reinstated Wenger with a new contract in the close season against all logic and good sense, they now find he had no intention to resign and none of allowing himself to be flanked with a managerial assistant. Were he to be sacked at this early stage of his new contract it would be hugely expensive for the club.

Perhaps the only recourse might be to appoint a managerial assistant, ignoring his protests, leaving Wenger the bleak choice between soldiering on under protest or walking out on a club for which he has beyond doubt done so much, but which has a team which no longer responds to his tactics or selection. WS

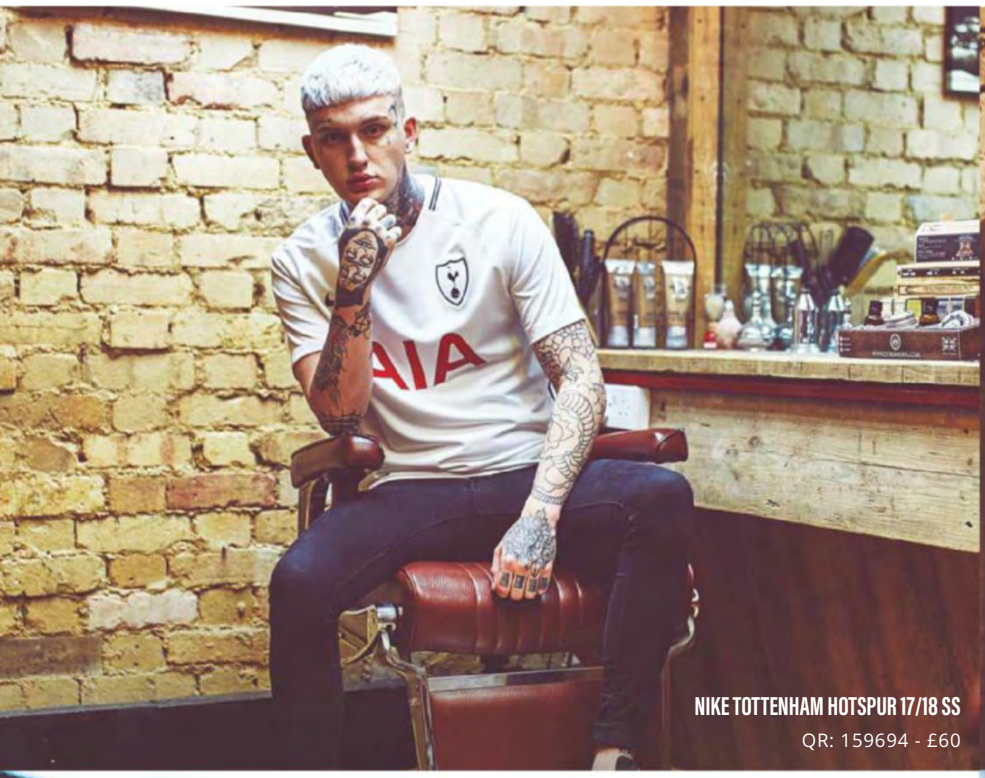
Off...Arsene Wenger substitutes Alexis Sanchez at Liverpool

● Read Brian Glanville's weekly online column at worldsoccer.com

PRO:DIRECT

SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND

LOOK SHARP IN THE LATEST PREMIER LEAGUE REPLICA SHIRTS



NIKE TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR 17/18 SS
QR: 159694 - £60

NIKE CHELSEA 17/18 HOME SS
QR: 159638 - £60

PUMA ARSENAL 17/18 HOME SS
QR: 156729 - £65

NEW BALANCE LIVERPOOL 17/18 HOME SS
QR: 161939 - £55

Morning, noon and night. In the stadium. On the streets. In the park. Whenever and wherever you go, you need to let them know. It's not just any team – it's your team. The one that that can be the difference between looking forward to starting the new week or dreading it!

It's all change this season as Tottenham and Chelsea join Manchester City and sport the Swoosh for the very first time with clean designs and classic colour palettes. Arsenal and Liverpool's shirts both feature deeper shades of red that nod to iconic kits of the past while the Manchester United jersey includes a grandad collar and contrast collar cuffs inspired by the terraces.

NIKE MANCHESTER CITY 17/18 HOME SS

QR: 153848 - £60

ADIDAS MANCHESTER UNITED 17/18 HOME SS

QR: 156097 - £55

Neymar THE DEAL THAT BROKE FOOTBALL

Summer 2017 will be remembered as the time when Qatar-owned Paris Saint-Germain smashed the world transfer record to sign Neymar from Barcelona in a move that changed football forever. ***By Howard Johnson***

When a player more than doubles the world-record transfer fee, you know it's big news. When that player leaves an established giant of the game to sign for a young pretender, a club that has been in existence for less than 50 years, you know it's enormous news.

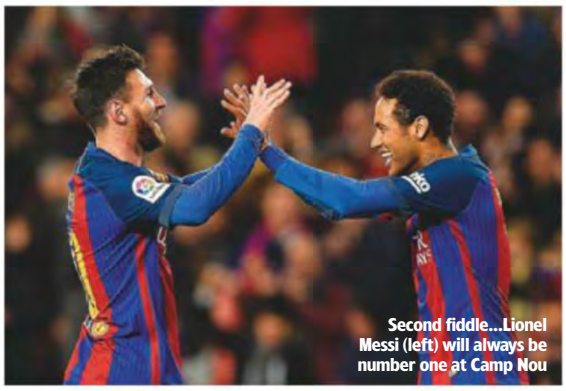
The transfer of Brazilian forward Neymar Da Silva Santos Junior from Barcelona to Paris Saint-Germain undermines many of the traditional assumptions about the game's power-brokers and shows it's no longer enough for clubs to rely on their heritage, or even the quality of the football they can offer, to retain their best players.

When Neymar arrived in Spain from Brazilian club Santos in June of 2013, the 21-year-old was treading a well-worn path. For decades La Liga's top two clubs, Barcelona and Real Madrid, had cherry-picked the world's best talent almost with impunity. It's true that the growing appeal of the Premier League in England had allowed clubs such as Chelsea, Manchester United and latterly Manchester City to flex their not-inconsiderable financial muscle, but it was still pretty much a recognised fact that when Spain's big two came calling, they invariably got their man.

Following the deal with Santos, Barca came under official investigation for transfer irregularities in a deal where it transpired that Neymar's parents netted a colossal $40million, but that seemed to mean very little. Barcelona were eventually charged with tax fraud. So what? They had Neymar.

In the four years that he was in the Catalan capital, Neymar won the treble of La Liga, Spanish Cup and Champions League in the 2014-15 season – scoring against Juventus in the Final in Berlin – and established himself as a globally recognised figure. His absence through injury from the Brazil side humiliated by Germany in the 2014 World Cup semi-final only confirmed his reputation as his country's leading player.

Remarkably, Neymar had to do all this while playing second fiddle to a fellow South American, Lionel Messi.



Second fiddle...Lionel Messi (left) will always be number one at Camp Nou

Neymar had the flicks, the tricks and the extravagant hairdos, but Messi was the beating heart of the Barcelona side. The Argentinian's loyalty to the club he had joined when just 13 made him the idol of Camp Nou. Not even an incredible record of 105 goals in 186 games could elevate Neymar to the exalted status of top dog. And what's more, performing in the same team as Messi would always hamper any personal footballing ▸

Welcome...Neymar is presented to fans at Parc des Princes

Emirates
10
RÊVONS
PLUS
GRAND

aspirations the Brazilian had.

Is it naive in such a cynical age to suggest that Neymar wanted out of Barca for footballing reasons? He has made no secret of his desire to win individual awards as the world's top player and there was almost zero chance that it was going to happen playing alongside Messi, who is a winner of five Ballon d'Ors. In order to create real history Neymar would need to find a place to call home where he would be the star, where he alone could drag a club up to new heights. Imagine coming to an outfit that had never won the Champions League and then helping them land it?

Only one of Europe's nouveau riche would fit the bill to fulfil that dream. And Paris has a lot going for it in that department. PSG's Qatari owners have a project where footballing ambitions go hand-in-hand with a desire to make the tiny monarchy a country of significance on the world stage.

The money they have been prepared to put into PSG is practically limitless because it's been about more than just

> "What most motivated me to join my new team-mates, is to help the club to conquer the titles their fans want"
>
> Neymar on joining Paris Saint-Germain

football. But Paris is also a capital city with a cosmopolitan reputation, a place where young rich people are going to feel at home.

The Qatari state's role quickly came under fire in France, with Lyon president Jean-Michel Aulas taking aim at the links between Paris Saint-Germain and the state of Qatar, arguing: "When we had our period of domination in Ligue 1 it was through our own means. We didn't have the financial support of a country."

Nevertheless, PSG's interest in Neymar was not conjured up on a whim this summer but was part of a carefully executed strategy. A serious bid for Neymar was placed in 2016 but swiftly dismissed by Barcelona. Neymar's former agent, Wagner Ribeiro, claimed PSG offered Barca €190m, revealing: "He was very close to PSG. He would have earned €40m a year."

The offer may have been rejected but Neymar used the interest to secure a new five-year deal with Barcelona. The new arrangement included an increased buyout clause of €200m for the first year of the contract, €222m for the second and €250m for the remaining three years.

Did Barca take their eye off the ball after agreeing the new deal? Club president Josep Maria Bartomeu has since come under fire for not preparing for the scenario where a club like PSG triggered Neymar's release clause.

But that's exactly what PSG did and Barcelona were forced to issue a terse statement early in August that read: "On Thursday afternoon [August 3] Neymar Jr's legal representatives visited in person the club's offices and made the payment of €222m in the player's name with regards to the unilateral termination of the contract that united both parties. As such, the club will pass on to UEFA the details of the above operation so that they can determine the disciplinary responsibilities that may arise from this case."

Neymar's lawyers, Juan de Dios Crespo

Airbrushed from history...Neymar is replaced in a poster outside Camp Nou

Up and running... celebrating his goal against Toulouse

and Marcos Motta, had earlier tried to make the deposit at Spain's La Liga headquarters but had been turned away. In the end, though, the transfer went through. As always in football, it seems that money eventually talked.

Barcelona, panicking after being snookered by PSG, responded angrily by announcing their intention to sue Neymar for breach of contract. Neymar, meanwhile, demanded a hilariously titled "loyalty bonus" he believed he was owed by the club as part of the contract he had signed in 2016.

There was talk that Neymar had been offered a sum in excess of the €222m buyout clause in his Barcelona contract to act as an ambassador for Qatar 2022. This way he could pay the release fees out of his own pocket and therefore potentially circumvent any Financial Fairplay (FFP) restrictions. However, UEFA is unlikely to be swayed by such arguments and the battle lines are drawn for a confrontation over FFP regulations over the coming months.

Neymar trotted out the usual platitudes when PSG unveiled their man at a press conference. "The biggest challenge, what most motivated me to join my new team-mates, is to help the club to conquer the titles their fans want," he said.

That's as maybe, but the five-year contract the 25-year-old has signed is worth an estimated £450m, which works out at around £515,000 per week.

Of course this is insane money, but PSG boss Nasser Al Khelaifi will think it money very well spent if Neymar helps coach Unai Emery's side to win the Champions League this season.

The record-busting strategy has not only added world-class players to an already talented squad; PSG have also inflated the European transfer market to previously unimaginable levels – a process that has hit their closest rivals hardest.

Barcelona were forced to offer over-the-top fees for Ousmane Dembele (Borussia Dortmund) and Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool), while Real Madrid found themselves priced out of a deal for Monaco's Kylian Mbappe, who has also been enticed to Paris.

Cashing in... merchandise on sale at the PSG club shop

Some clubs did benefit from the fallout, with Juventus signing French midfielder Blaise Matuidi for a modest €20m and West Bromwich Albion getting Polish midfielder Grzegorz Krychowiak on loan as PSG sought to trim their squad. But the overall effect of the Neymar transfer has been to inflate fees for average players across the continent.

On the pitch, at least, the early signs are promising for PSG. Neymar started his life in France in the best way possible, scoring three and notching three assists in his first two games in a PSG shirt although, admittedly, he achieved this against Guingamp and Toulouse, hardly powerhouse outfits. It's when PSG's Champions League campaign starts in September that we will really see just how much Neymar has added to what is already a powerful squad.

PSG's fans, meanwhile, have been snapping up replica Neymar shirts like they're going out of fashion. But not everyone in France is in thrall to the Brazilian superstar.

Asked on French TV about "Neymania" just before the player's debut away at Guingamp, one fan simply shrugged his shoulders and replied: "Couldn't give a toss, mate. I support Marseille." WS

Loaned by PSG... Grzegorz Krychowiak

Sold by PSG... Blaise Matuidi

Qatar: the country that bought football

Neymar deal is the latest move from gas-rich state to secure global credibility

Global news... Neymar arrives for a press conference

It happens seldom in the world of sport, but the signing of Neymar by Paris Saint-Germain was a genuine international news event. Almost every TV channel from the USA to China led with the news that the 25-year-old Brazilian forward's move had smashed the transfer-fee world record.

Even more sober voices, such as BBC World Service's *Business Daily* or the *Washington Post*'s foreign policy writer Ishaan Tharoor, opined on a deal which could cost PSG almost half a billion pounds once wages and bonuses are taken into account over the full length of his contract.

The sheer size of the numbers involved provoked a worldwide frenzy, sparking different reactions in different people. There was incredulity, grief, feigned insouciance and then, finally, anger in the Catalan capital.

Neymar's "betrayal" wasn't quite of Luis Figo proportions but it was close. The club had exposed itself to several court cases over his 2013 move to Europe from Brazil. And, besides, who chooses to leave a place that still proudly clings to its motto, "*Mes que un club*", even as the world of modern football and modern finance collide around it?

The fee seemed so large, almost obscene, that a familiar question was why PSG, and why now?

"Because of the objectives they have, the ambitions they have. They are very similar to mine," Neymar replied when asked just that by CNN's Christina Macfarlane. "They are one of the biggest clubs in the world I want to be part of their history. I came here to make history and win unprecedented titles."

There was less incredulity in Paris and Doha, the real nexus of the Neymar deal. As much as it was PSG headlining the move, this was a deal that was born and raised in Qatar. Since 2011 PSG have been owned by Qatar Sports Investments (QSI), a sovereign investment vehicle of the Persian Gulf state who will host the World Cup finals in 2022. The money to pay for Neymar is, effectively, the state of Qatar's money.

PSG's chairman, Nasser Al Khelaifi – a former Qatari tennis player who once held an ATP ranking – also chairs QSI. Neymar's signing had provided PSG's owners with something they had always sought but had never quite achieved: a grudging acceptance as an equal at the game's top table. The signing of one of the world's best – and most marketable – players in the prime of his career was a coup for the club. Only the signings of Cristiano Ronaldo or Lionel Messi might have topped it.

"I started thinking about how to sign Neymar three years ago, and it took us a year to think about how to talk to him and Barcelona," Al Khelaifi told the Spanish press after the signing. "Two weeks ago that operation really started."

Rewind to the start of the millennia and Qatar was virtually unknown to most football fans in the rest of the world. But, under the previous emir, Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, the country went all out to invest its extraordinary, newly harnessed natural-gas wealth into sport.

Both Qatar and the UAE emirate of Dubai made sport an integral plank of its foreign policy, namely that hosting and investing in high-profile events provided two invaluable things: an incredible opportunity to re-brand and advertise the country on the international stage, and projecting the image of an equal partner among the world's elite nations.

The succession of investments and successes – alongside its failures – are well known. The opening of the Aspire Academy in 2004. The founding of QSI by Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, then Qatar's crown prince, which took place in the same year. Huge investments that brought big-name players such as Pep Guardiola and Marcel Desailly to play in the nascent Qatar Stars League. Failed bids for the Olympics. A string of high-profile tournaments in a range of sports from golf to MotoGP. Huge sponsorship deals between state-funded entities like the Qatar Foundation and Qatar Airways with Barcelona. And, of course, the successful but controversial bid to host the 2022 World Cup. A slew of negative stories followed, focusing on the appalling treatment of migrant workers, an issue that had been criminally ignored across the Gulf, including in Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

Investment...the Aspire Academy

Just how the World Cup vote was won is still an issue that is likely to run and run. The now infamous meeting at the Elysee Palace between Sheikh Tamim, Nasser Al Khelaifi, Michel Platini and France's then-president Nicolas Sarkozy, which took place in November 2010, before the vote, is still much debated. Platini always

denied that he was pressured to vote for Qatar, but he did anyway.

Once the vote was won, PSG – who Sarkozy supports – was bought by QSI. The TV rights for French football were later bought by beIN Sports, a spin-off from Al Jazeera Sports, who paid over $1 billion for them in 2014. Al Khelaifi was the founder and chairman of the company. Sheikh Tamim replaced his father as Emir in 2013. Meanwhile, a French anti-corruption investigation is currently looking into Sarkozy's relationship with Qatar and a network of deals signed around the same time.

And yet the end goal has been achieved. Everyone knows who Qatar is and the power of that name recognition was proved over this summer's political crisis.

Qatar has been ostracised by its neighbours, led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Nominally, the justification for the blockade was its alleged support for terrorism. Qatar supported Mohamed Morsi's brief Muslim Brotherhood-aligned regime in Egypt before it was deposed, and Gulf autocracies such as the UAE see the Muslim Brotherhood's brand of political Islam as an existential threat to their power. However, the real reason may well lie in the petty jealousies of Qatar's success and especially its freewheeling Al Jazeera TV channel, which has aired critical stories on its neighbours.

> "I started thinking about how to sign Neymar three years ago...two weeks ago that operation really started"
>
> Nasser Al Khelaifi on making the deal

PSG chairman... Nasser Al Khelaifi

Yet, even under blockade, Qatar – which has a huge surplus thanks to years of high gas prices – has not been brought to its knees. Instead, right in the middle of the crisis, Neymar was signed.

"They are trying to literally score a point here," Christopher Davidson, an academic and expert on the Gulf, told AP. "It sounds like a lot of money but given the stakes are hundreds of billions of dollars because of the World Cup, Neymar will be seen as a sound investment by Qatar. It proves they have the funds available and they have some liquidity to still be taken seriously."

For now, Qatar, QSI and PSG have more mundane issues to deal with than geopolitics: that of Financial Fairplay (FFP) compliance. Just what financial manoeuvrings PSG will undertake to avoid sanction are so far a mystery. Not that Al Khelaifi is losing any sleep over it. "I'm not really worried at all about the Financial Fairplay because we have complied with the regulation since the start of the Financial Fairplay," he said after the Neymar signing. "We are very relaxed, we have very good people around me, the management, taking care of it, so we are very relaxed about it."

Fans...Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo (left) and former French president Nicolas Sarkozy

To add another complication, a few weeks later, PSG signed Monaco's Kylian Mbappe, initially as a loan move but with an agreement to buy for €140m next year, meaning any transfer fee will not show up in the 2016-17 accounts that will be analysed by FFP regulators.

The two transfers have put UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin under a great deal of pressure. If they pass without censure, many argue that FFP is dead. But perhaps that is to be expected. When countries invest in football, the game has different rules. "Once a country owns a club," Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said after the Neymar transfer, "everything is possible."

James Montague

Ceferin talks tough

But will the UEFA president act against PSG over their record spending?

Aleksander Ceferin has a problem with Paris Saint-Germain, Neymar and Kylian Mbappe: no one will be happy with whatever he may say right now about the record-busting transfers in the context of Financial Fairplay (FFP).

Ceferin stepped into the French epicentre of the financial earthquake when the European federation, over which he has presided since last September, staged its high-profile seasonal launch in Monaco with the draws for the Champions and Europa Leagues group stages.

His predecessor Michel Platini – until he fell foul of disloyal payments, ethics charges and suspensions – dealt suavely with awkward issues thanks to the benefit of respect for his playing achievements layered with the enduring adoration heaped on him by the French and Italian media.

Ceferin is a different character. He is a lawyer not an old sporting hero. Informally he can be charming, with a sharp sense of humour and fascination for worlds far beyond football. But he tightens up – to his disadvantage – when confronted by cameras, voice recorders and notebooks.

Thus, caught in the headlights of a media inquisition about Neymar, Mbappe and perceptions of a collapsing FFP system, he could only raise a diplomatic shield in the faint hope that Jose Narciso da Cunha Rodrigues, the Portuguese judge who chairs the club financial control body will come riding to UEFA's rescue next year.

Ceferin understands the howls of concern about football finance running out of control but he has no instant panacea. If one existed then the great and the good of world football would have enacted it years ago.

He has tried to look at the positives, saying: "Being objective, football is a fantastic product whose popularity is very pleasing. For we generate enormous revenues and give back to the game almost all of it which permits the development of the game. The problem is the money which flows out of football."

> "If that is not the case then we will teach them. I am not talking only about Paris Saint-Germain"
>
> Ceferin on whether clubs are abiding by FFP rules

PSG and Manchester City were rapped over the knuckles by UEFA's club control body three years ago, then fined and

Signing...Kylian Mbappe

Pressure...Ceferin

Talks...PSG president Nasser Al Khelaifi (right) with Ceferin

Record...Zinedine Zidane went to Real Madrid in 2001

ordered to trim their squads in the Champions League. Conveniently they purged their sins earlier this year. However the subsequent spending splurge by PSG president Nasser Al Khelaifi prompted doubts about whether the French club, at least, had learned their lesson.

Ceferin says: "To be honest, I hope so. If that is not the case then we will teach them. I am not talking only about Paris Saint-Germain."

Of course while UEFA have been working on it, so have PSG. The catch of FFP is that the success or failure of a club's balancing act becomes apparent only when the year-end accounts are presented next spring. Al Khelaifi knows this as well as Ceferin and Cunha Rodrigues and it would be naive to suppose that PSG have not constructed a financial alibi.

Certainly the football financial world has changed since 2011 when Platini introduced FFP with, in general, acknowledged success. Ceferin adds: "Times change and we [UEFA] need to adjust and react. Our research shows that the transfer of Zinedine Zidane from Juventus to Real Madrid in 2001 was almost like the Neymar transfer now when you compare the budgets of the clubs and the overall market.

"We started to revise the rules in June and what has happened since then in the transfer market has given us even more reason to maintain the reforms.

"Transfer regulations fall within FIFA's remit but we have an important role to play because the most important transfers, apart from a few in China, take place within Europe."

In the past it was the medium-sized and small clubs which felt UEFA's wrath. Ceferin denies, however, that UEFA was too soft on the big clubs for fear of causing an upset which might provoke renewed fighting talk about a breakaway super league.

He argues: "After this transfer window and the completion of our accounts checks, we will apply exactly the same rules to all of them. If we did not respect our own rules then we would be a toothless tiger.

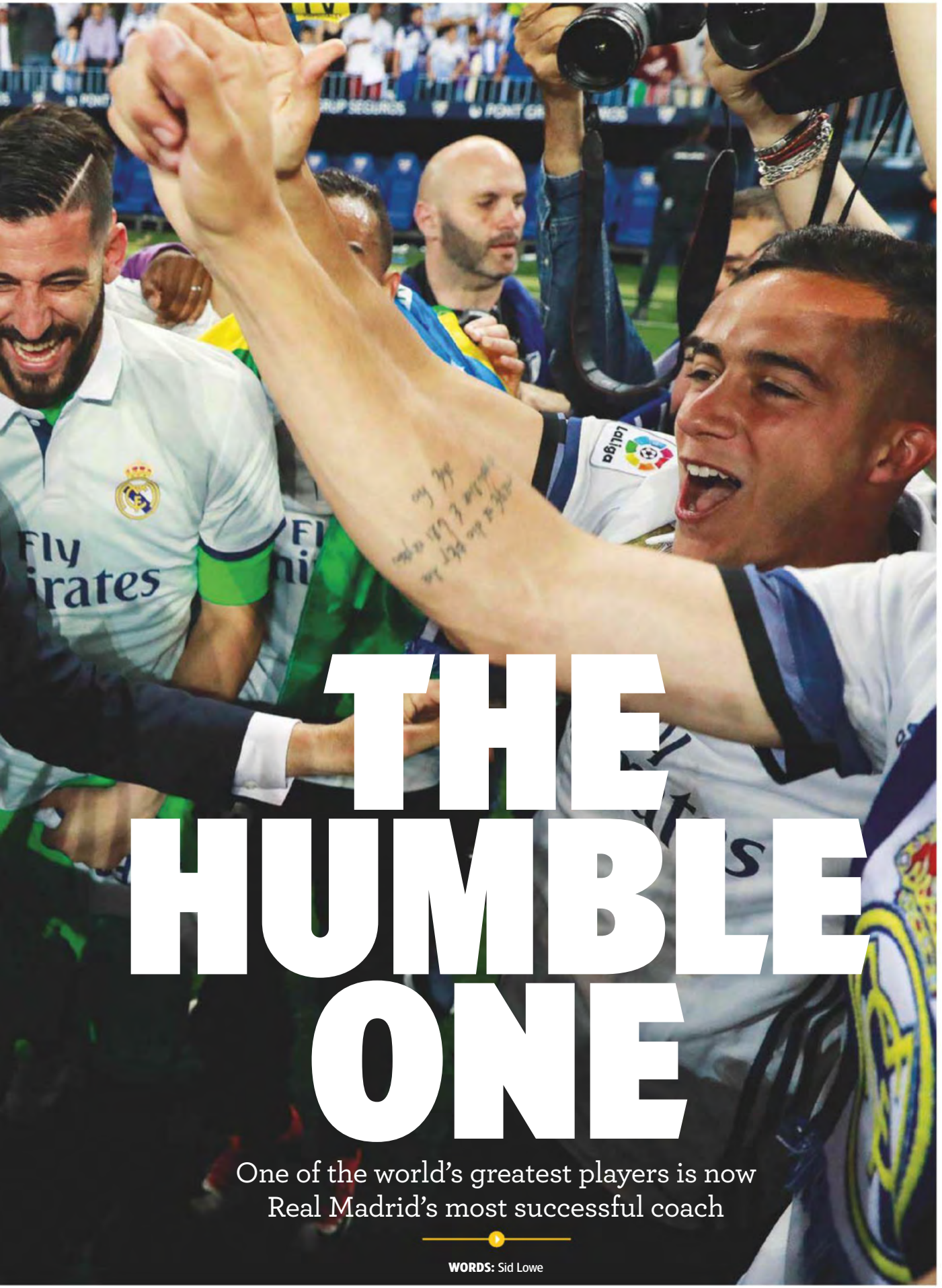
"Even the big clubs know that something has to happen. We cannot close the gap between the elite and other clubs but we can slow its development. When Financial Fairplay was launched it was about financial stability, not about competition. The clubs made a total loss of €1.7bn in 2010, today it's down to €286m. This is a success."

But he knows very well that the success or failure of his reign may be judged, ultimately and not until next year, against the PSG assault on Financial Fairplay. His clock is ticking.

Keir Radnedge

World record transfers

1905	ALF COMMON	Sunderland to Middlesbrough	£1,000
1952	HANS JEPPSON	Atalanta to Napoli	£52,000
1954	JUAN SCHIAFFINO	Penarol to Milan	£72,000
1957	OMAR SIVORI	River Plate to Juventus	£93,000
1961	LUIS SUAREZ	Barcelona to Internazionale	£152,000
1963	ANGELO SORMANI	Mantova to Roma	£250,000
1967	HARALD NIELSEN	Bologna to Internazionale	£300,000
1968	PIETRO ANASTASI	Varese to Juventus	£500,000
1973	JOHAN CRUYFF	Ajax to Barcelona	£922,000
1975	GIUSEPPE SAVOLDI	Bologna to Napoli	£1.2m
1976	PAOLO ROSSI	Juventus to Vicenza	£1.75m
1984	DIEGO MARADONA	Barcelona to Napoli	£5m
1987	RUUD GULLIT	PSV to Milan	£6m
1990	ROBERTO BAGGIO	Fiorentina to Juventus	£8m
1992	JEAN-PIERRE PAPIN	Marseille to Milan	£10m
1992	GIANLUCA VIALLA	Sampdoria to Juventus	£12m
1992	GIANLUIGI LENTINI	Torino to Milan	£13m
1996	RONALDO	PSV to Barcelona	£13.2m
1996	ALAN SHEARER	Blackburn Rovers to Newcastle United	£15m
1997	RONALDO	Barcelona to Internazionale	£19.5m
1998	DENILSON	Sao Paulo to Real Betis	£21.5m
1999	CHRISTIAN VIERI	Lazio to Internazionale	£32.1m
2000	HERNAN CRESPO	Parma to Lazio	£35.5m (€55m)
2000	LUIS FIGO	Barcelona to Real Madrid	£37m (€62m)
2001	ZINEDINE ZIDANE	Juventus to Real Madrid	£47.2m (€77.5m)
2009	KAKA	Milan to Real Madrid	£56m (€67m)
2009	CRISTIANO RONALDO	Manchester United to Real Madrid	£80m (€94m)
2013	GARETH BALE	Tottenham Hotspur to Real Madrid	£85m
2016	PAUL POGBA	Juventus to Manchester United	£93.25m (€105m)
2017	NEYMAR	Barcelona to Paris Saint-Germain	£198m (€222m)



THE HUMBLE ONE

One of the world's greatest players is now Real Madrid's most successful coach

WORDS: Sid Lowe

The day he played his last game for Real Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu, Zinedine Zidane slipped out of the stadium without a word – which was a very Zinedine Zidane way of going. It was left for everyone else to celebrate him and for him to just play football.

When the teams came out they wore shirts with "Zidane, 2001-2005" stitched into them. All around the ground, fans wore his number five shirt. Giant screens replayed his best moments in white, including *that* European Cup Final goal. And there were banners everywhere, with one begging: "Referee, please don't blow the final whistle: that would be the signal for Zidane to leave us."

Even before the referee had blown, Zidane had departed, withdrawn to a standing ovation three minutes from the end. He looked a little embarrassed by it, hiding in the tunnel, waiting patiently out of sight for the game to end so that he could swap shirts with Juan Roman Riquelme. Team-mates had to literally push him back out to where supporters were waiting to applaud him one last time. And then he went back in, got changed and left it all behind.

It was typical Zidane. He was always a strange, reluctant kind of *galactico*: quiet, humble, maybe even a little shy, not keen to be on camera. He didn't want a fuss or a fanfare.

Zidane still had the World Cup to come. When Spain met France, one front page ran with the headline: "We're going to retire Zidane." He admitted he had seen it and been annoyed by it, and then left it looking daft as France beat Spain and went all the way to the Final. As they progressed, so the volume rose, with messages from Spain begging him not to retire. But Zidane knew it was time. Madrid hadn't won a trophy in three years – and he admitted that he felt responsible for that – and he could see his own decline. He no longer felt as he once had; he needed to get away.

He was tired of it all: the hotels, the travelling, the pressure he piled upon himself, everything that went with the game. But not the game itself.

In retirement, Zidane was given a role at Madrid, but it was ill-defined and just there for the sake of being there. He eventually came to feel that there was something a little empty about it. The competition pulled at him. He had been away and he admitted that he wanted to do something more real. "You miss the adrenaline of playing: you'll always miss that," he said, "but not the rest of it."

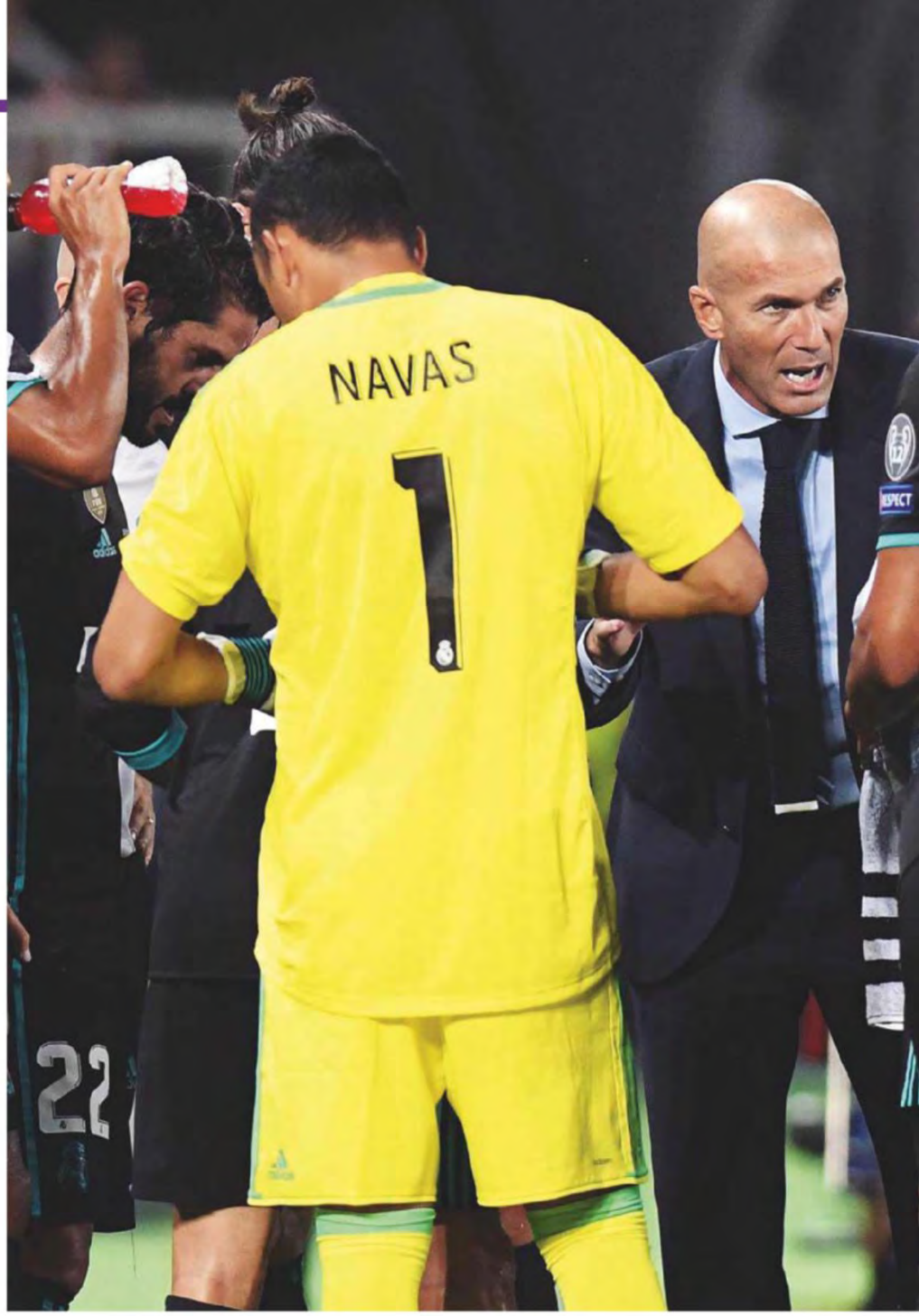
He went in to Valdebebas every day, watched the youth team, saw some players he liked, advised the president. But he wanted more. He missed being able to compete.

One thing often overlooked with Zidane was that he was a competitor above all else; you don't come out of the Place Tartane in Marseille without being tough.

The very last day of his career, his 789th game, was the 2006 World Cup Final, a match which began with him chipping in a classy penalty and ended with him head-butting Marco Materazzi. Afterwards, Jacques Chirac called him a man of "heart and conviction".

On the day that *Zidane: A Twenty-first Century Portrait* was filmed, he received a red card too, one of 14 in his career. That was part of his portrait, as was the sweat that would pour from him like someone had left a tap on. It was a telling image. He wanted to win. One day in Valladolid he famously performed a pirouette around the goalkeeper and then put the ball over. While the media and fans said that the fact that he missed made it even more beautiful – art for art's sake – he just said: "I missed."

People looked at the way he played, the grace and the elegance, and thought it was effortless, but it wasn't. For all the talent, he always had doubts. And he worked endlessly at his game, running miles on the pitch and off it. He rejected



In charge...issuing instructions to his Real Madrid side

Farewell...at the end of his final game for Real at the Bernabeu

Learning...in charge of Real reserves, Castilla

the idea that he was a ballet dancer. Yes, it's nice for people to say that, he conceded, but he was there to compete. And now he wanted to compete again.

He didn't know if he would be a good coach, but he wanted to see. So he took his coaching badges in France and travelled around Europe, talking to people about it.

In France, he paid special attention to Marcelo Bielsa and Christian Gourcuff; he then went to Germany to see Pep Guardiola. "The things I had in my head but could not seem to clarify, have been defined now," he said after one qualification course in France. "I know what I want to do and how."

Zidane told Perez of his plans. For the president, it was enough just to have Zidane around – and probably safer to have him in an ambassadorial role, not exposed to the demands of competition,

Seeing red... head-butting Marco Materazzi in the World Cup Final

the chance of failure – but this was what he wanted.

He joined Carlo Ancelotti's backroom staff and was assistant coach when Real won their 10th European Cup. Much of his time was spent working one-on-one with players. He coached Real Madrid's B team, Castilla, and there was always an assumption that he would take over the first team sometime. Yet there were also significant doubts. Rayo Vallecano manager Paco Jemez famously, and vociferously, complained that Zidane was coaching Castilla without a UEFA Pro Licence. With Castilla, Zidane learnt not just about coaching but also much of what goes with it – even in the B team there are politics and stars to manage.

Internally, there were some doubts about him as a coach for Castilla, let alone for Real Madrid. At one point, there were discussions about letting him go, and when offers came from France, Madrid did not mind – it might suit them for him to cut his teeth somewhere else, or even just to go and work elsewhere, risk averted. But Zidane chose to stay, preparing himself.

He was not given the first-team job, Rafa Benitez was chosen instead, but when problems arose it was natural that they should turn to him. When Benitez was sacked in January 2016, Zidane was hurriedly brought in to replace him.

> "You miss the adrenaline of playing: you'll always miss that...but not the rest of it"
>
> Zidane on retiring as a player

When he was presented as the club's new coach, Zidane was asked what would count as success. "Win everything," was his reply.

Eighteen months on, he pretty much has, claiming a league, two European Cups, the World Club Cup, the UEFA Super Cup twice. In just 20 European games he won as many Champions League titles as Alex Ferguson, Jose Mourinho or Pep Guardiola.

He said he was happier than when he had won things as a player; this was "totally different", the responsibility was his. He said so after the league title in his second season, not after the first European Cup, which was significant: this was different to the debut season, too. He had planned for this, seen the job through from start to finish, it really was *his* success. If his first half season had

been fortunate, the second was not.

Still some resisted, of course. It is easier with Madrid, they said – and there may be something in that, although there are unique difficulties too. The success was still gigantic and unexpected. Few saw it in him. As a player, Zidane had once said he wouldn't be a coach and his team-mates didn't imagine him as one – one said he was practically "mute." Even when he was working with Ancelotti, not everyone saw it. It was one thing to assist, another to lead.

"No one could see him being a coach, none of us," the Madrid defender Alvaro Arbeloa admits. "He was Ancelotti's assistant coach, sure, but we weren't so sure...and now look at him."

Although he is calm, quiet, seemingly granting latitude to players, there is control and calculation too. And when he talks, even if he talks less than some coaches, people listen – perhaps precisely because he does not talk often. Perhaps that is also because he knows what it is to be an elite player, like them. Benitez, for all his talents and knowledge, didn't; they never warmed to him.

Some of Madrid's squad sarcastically referred to Benitez as the number 10. He was a renowned coach, but had never played and for some that mattered. With Zidane, they got a real number 10 – one of the best there has ever been, even if he did wear five at the Bernabeu.

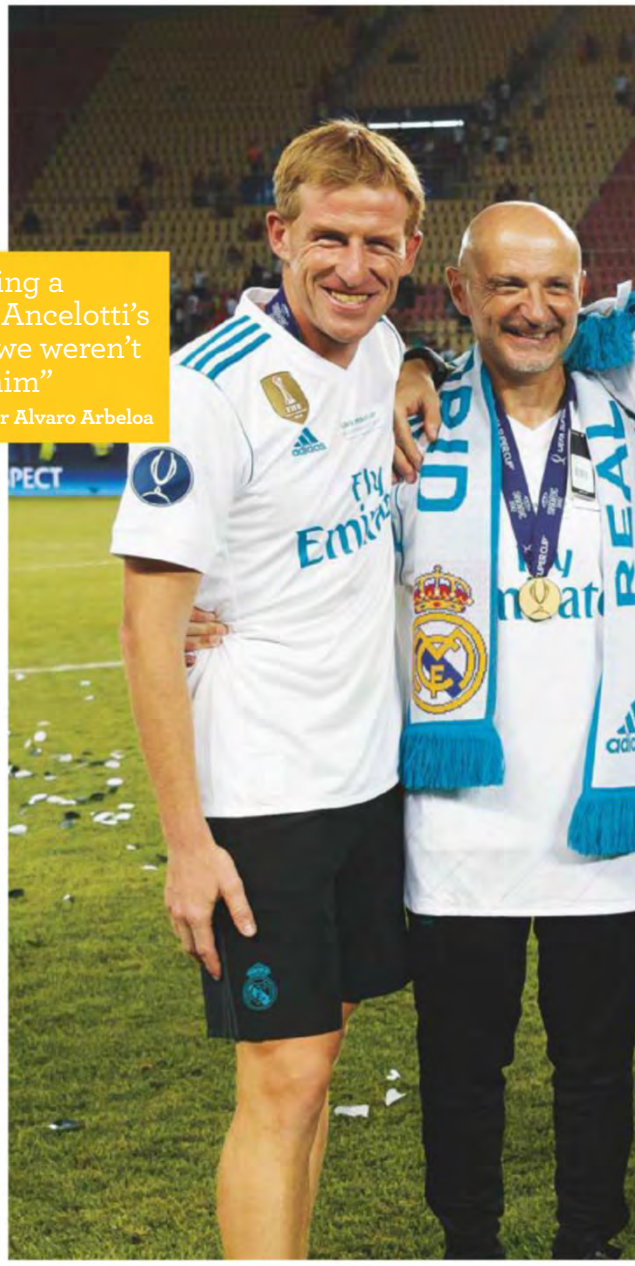
They got an equal, a better, but not

> "No one could see him being a coach, none of us. He was Ancelotti's assistant coach, sure, but we weren't so sure...and now look at him"
>
> **Former Real Madrid defender Alvaro Arbeloa**

someone who ever acted like he was better. Instead, they got someone who trusts in talent, believes in players, believes the game is theirs – and that they should feel that it's theirs.

Ask him to explain his success, what it is he has, and he will reply: "good footballers". Even when he has mentioned the work from the coaching

Assistant...Zidane worked under Carlo Ancelotti (left)



ZIDANE'S INNER CIRCLE

GUY LACOMBE
His tutor as he completed his UEFA Pro Licence in France.

DAVID BETTONI
A trainee with him at Cannes – although his own career was a limited one – and now his assistant coach.

ANTONIO PINTUS
Fitness coach and vitally important to the preparation of the team. Had worked with Zidane at Juventus.

CRISTIANO RONALDO
"The coach has been very intelligent," Ronaldo said after Zidane managed to get him to do what no one else ever had: sit out.

FLORENTINO PEREZ
Madrid's president, who says signing Zidane was the best thing he ever did for the club and now calls him the best coach in the world.

Success...winning the 2017 UEFA Super Cup

staff, it is a theme he has returned to repeatedly. And it's always "we" – all of us, footballers first.

Benitez tried to tell Cristiano Ronaldo, a Ballon d'Or winner over a decade into his career, how to strike a ball, which way to stand when he took free-kicks. All he got was coldness, bemusement and a touch of resentment.

Benitez told Luka Modric not to play passes with the outside of his foot, as he had always done. "Those passes Luka does with the outside of his foot, pfff..." Zidane cooed, smiling. Always smiling, never a drama. Don't censor, celebrate; don't endure, enjoy. Listen too; understand. Even as a player he would observe carefully, taking it all in.

In the build-up to the first European Cup Final, Marcelo said that he had come in and "not trodden on anyone's toes", which sounded like a backhanded compliment, but there's something in it. Sergio Ramos talks about him expressing "the same simplicity and humility as he did when he was a player".

Fan...Luka Modric

But that hid the work, the certainty of his ideas. For example, as a player for Madrid and France he understood better than most the damage that had been done by Claude Makelele's departure and that informed his determination to include Casemiro.

He pushed too, especially in that second season when he would prepare the pre-season. Physical condition was his obsession, driven by Antonio Pintus. He rotated, as well, making every player feel like a participant. He convinced Ronaldo to do something no one else had been able to do: to sit out, to rest, not to play, not to worry about goal totals.

As the season entered the spring he played just one of five away games; as it entered the decisive final games Ronaldo was reborn. On the eve of the European Cup Final, Zidane was asked who was better: Ronaldo or him? "He scores more goals," Zidane said.

The following night, Ronaldo scored twice. Afterwards, Zidane was asked if he was the best coach in the world. "No, not that, no," he said. But he is a coach: not so long ago he didn't know if he could be.

So, he went and found out. WS

Champions League group stage

The top two in each group go through to the knockout phase; the third-placed teams enter the Europa League.

Group A

SEP 12	Benfica (v) CSKA Moscow
SEP 12	Manchester United (v) Basle
SEP 27	Basle (v) Benfica
SEP 27	CSKA Moscow (v) Manchester United
OCT 18	CSKA Moscow (v) Basle
OCT 18	Benfica (v) Manchester United
OCT 31	Basle (v) CSKA Moscow
OCT 31	Manchester United (v) Benfica
NOV 22	CSKA Moscow (v) Benfica
NOV 22	Basle (v) Manchester United
DEC 5	Benfica (v) Basle
DEC 5	Manchester United (v) CSKA Moscow

Group B

Sep 12	Bayern Munich (v) Anderlecht
Sep 12	Celtic (v) Paris Saint-Germain
Sep 27	Paris Saint-Germain (v) Bayern Munich
Sep 27	Anderlecht (v) Celtic
Oct 18	Anderlecht (v) Paris Saint-Germain
Oct 18	Bayern Munich (v) Celtic
Oct 31	Paris Saint-Germain (v) Anderlecht
Oct 31	Celtic (v) Bayern Munich
Nov 22	Anderlecht (v) Bayern Munich
Nov 22	Paris Saint-Germain (v) Celtic
Dec 5	Bayern Munich (v) Paris Saint-Germain
Dec 5	Celtic (v) Anderlecht

Bayern Munich... Robert Lewandowski

Group C

Sep 12	Chelsea (v) Qarabag
Sep 12	Roma (v) Atletico Madrid
Sep 27	Qarabag (v) Roma
Sep 27	Atletico Madrid (v) Chelsea
Oct 18	Qarabag (v) Atletico Madrid
Oct 18	Chelsea (v) Roma
Oct 31	Atletico Madrid (v) Qarabag
Oct 31	Roma (v) Chelsea
Nov 22	Qarabag (v) Chelsea
Nov 22	Atletico Madrid (v) Roma
Dec 5	Chelsea (v) Atletico Madrid
Dec 5	Roma (v) Qarabag

Barcelona... Lionel Messi

Group D

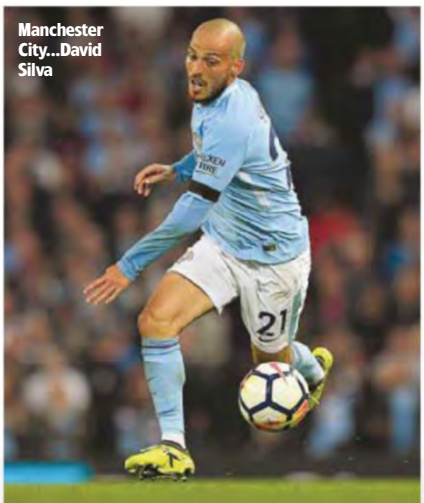
Sep 12	Barcelona (v) Juventus
Sep 12	Olympiakos (v) Sporting
Sep 27	Sporting (v) Barcelona
Sep 27	Juventus (v) Olympiakos
Oct 18	Juventus (v) Sporting
Oct 18	Barcelona (v) Olympiakos
Oct 31	Sporting (v) Juventus
Oct 31	Olympiakos (v) Barcelona
Nov 22	Juventus (v) Barcelona
Nov 22	Sporting (v) Olympiakos
Dec 5	Barcelona (v) Sporting
Dec 5	Olympiakos (v) Juventus

Group E

Sep 13	Maribor (v) Spartak Moscow
Sep 13	Liverpool (v) Sevilla
Sep 26	Sevilla (v) Maribor
Sep 26	Spartak Moscow (v) Liverpool
Oct 17	Spartak Moscow (v) Sevilla
Oct 17	Maribor (v) Liverpool
Nov 1	Sevilla (v) Spartak Moscow
Nov 1	Liverpool (v) Maribor
Nov 21	Spartak Moscow (v) Maribor
Nov 21	Sevilla (v) Liverpool
Dec 6	Maribor (v) Sevilla
Dec 6	Liverpool (v) Spartak Moscow

Group F

Sep 13	Feyenoord (v) Manchester City
Sep 13	Shakhtar Donetsk (v) Napoli
Sep 26	Napoli (v) Feyenoord
Sep 26	Manchester City (v) Shakhtar Donetsk
Oct 17	Manchester City (v) Napoli
Oct 17	Feyenoord (v) Shakhtar Donetsk
Nov 1	Napoli (v) Manchester City
Nov 1	Shakhtar Donetsk (v) Feyenoord
Nov 21	Manchester City (v) Feyenoord
Nov 21	Napoli (v) Shakhtar Donetsk
Dec 6	Feyenoord (v) Napoli
Dec 6	Shakhtar Donetsk (v) Manchester City


Manchester City...David Silva

Monaco... Radamel Falcao

Group G

Sep 13	RB Leipzig (v) Monaco
Sep 13	Porto (v) Besiktas
Sep 26	Besiktas (v) RB Leipzig
Sep 26	Monaco (v) Porto
Oct 17	Monaco (v) Besiktas
Oct 17	RB Leipzig (v) Porto
Nov 1	Besiktas (v) Monaco
Nov 1	Porto (v) RB Leipzig
Nov 21	Besiktas (v) Porto
Nov 21	Monaco (v) RB Leipzig
Dec 6	RB Leipzig (v) Besiktas
Dec 6	Porto (v) Monaco

Borussia Dortmund... Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang

Group H

Sep 13	Real Madrid (v) APOEL
Sep 13	Tottenham H (v) Borussia Dortmund
Sep 26	Borussia Dortmund (v) Real Madrid
Sep 26	APOEL (v) Tottenham H
Oct 17	APOEL (v) Borussia Dortmund
Oct 17	Real Madrid (v) Tottenham H
Nov 1	Borussia Dortmund (v) APOEL
Nov 1	Tottenham H (v) Real Madrid
Nov 21	APOEL (v) Real Madrid
Nov 21	Borussia Dortmund (v) Tottenham H
Dec 6	Real Madrid (v) Borussia Dortmund
Dec 6	Tottenham H (v) APOEL

Real Madrid ... Casemiro

BENFICA

Sale of star players may prove costly

Has the selling strategy gone too far?
Three members of Benfica's defensive unit were sold in the summer, bringing in huge transfer fees. But while it is usual for the club to lose one or two big players each season, cashing in on Ederson (Manchester City), Nelson Semedo (Barcelona) and Victor Lindelof (Manchester United) means too much quality may have been siphoned out of the team, leaving a huge hole at the back.

Can they take the next step?
Benfica make no secret of their goal to dominate domestically and be competitive in Europe, recovering the status that made them famous in the 1960s. The first objective has been achieved, with four straight league titles; now, with two successive qualifications for the Champions League group phase, a place in the last four is their next target.

Will the golden oldies hold up?
Luisao is 36, keeper Julio Cesar two years older, while striker Jonas is 33 and defenders Jardel and Eliseu are both the wrong side of 30. Benfica have produced an array of outstanding youngsters in recent years, only to sell most of them.

Golden boot...Jonas

● TACTICS
Rui Vitoria has stuck to 4-4-2 since he took over at the Estadio da Luz two years ago, although with skilful striker Jonas often dropping back to connect midfield and attack, it can be viewed as a 4-4-1-1. The two central midfielders are the heartbeat of the team, with the underrated Ljubomir Fejsa providing fantastic cover for the defence and Portugal international Pizzi – the country's player of the year last time out – getting better and better with each passing season. On the right flank Eduardo Salvio offers a scoring threat, while on the other side the hard-working and tricky Franco Cervi will help to lend a chiefly attacking team good balance.

KEY MAN
Pizzi (above), knits it all together in midfield.

SECRET WEAPON
Raul Jimenez, Mexican striker who can be lethal when appearing from the bench.

YOUNG GUN
Diogo Goncalves, forward who shone at the Under-20 World Cup.

4-4-2

MANCHESTER UNITED

Domestic distraction must be avoided

Has Neymar done Pogba a favour?
Neymar's move to Paris Saint-Germain means Paul Pogba is no longer the world's most expensive player. Early-season signs are that the midfielder has been emboldened by losing the tag, as well as by the arrival of the combative Nemanja Matic alongside him.

Will second-season syndrome work again for Jose Mourinho?
United's Portuguese manager has a proud record of winning titles in his second season. This season, with a new spine – Victor Lindelof (who will face his former Benfica team-mates), Matic and Romelu Lukaku – and the return of Zlatan Ibrahimovic in the new year, the pressure is on to deliver. United must be careful they do not get distracted by a domestic title battle with Pep Guardiola's City.

Will the money keep rolling in?
United are well-placed to win a fourth European Cup (after 1968, 1999 and 2008) but the Glazer family continues to take millions from the club in interest payments. The club remains profitable, however, thanks to an extensive programme of regional sponsorship deals.

Freed up...Paul Pogba

● TACTICS
Mourinho flirted with a back three in the European Super Cup but ditched it at half-time when 2-0 down to Real Madrid. More likely is a 4-2-3-1 or 4-1-4-1, with the midfield personnel shuffled around. The arrival of Matic from Chelsea has freed up Pogba to get further forward, while Lukaku gives the attack a new cutting edge. Anthony Martial and Jesse Lingard are attacking subs from wide positions while Marouane Fellaini (as seen in the European loss to Real Madrid) brings physical presence, with Ander Herrera a midfield alternative. One weakness is that United, historically famed for their wingers, lack real width, with striker Marcus Rashford deployed on the left flank.

KEY MAN
Paul Pogba, French powerhouse midfielder.

SECRET WEAPON
Zlatan Ibrahimovic (above), mercurial back-up striker has signed for another year at United.

YOUNG GUN
Andreas Pereira, highly-rated Brazilian.

4-2-3-1

BASLE

Swiss champions are not to be underestimated

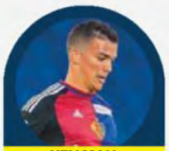
How to replace Delgado?
Supporters are still coming to terms with the fact that skipper Matias Delgado opted to call time on his career just one game into the new campaign. Unable to hold back the tears as he tried to explain his decision, he said he no longer had the fire to carry on.

What is the back-story to the club's new management structure ?
It's been all change at St Jakob-Park, with legendary club striker Marco Streller appointed director of sport and youth-team boss Raphael Wicky handed the first-team reins. The aim is to have at least six to eight homegrown youngsters in the senior squad.

What are their chances in Europe?
Twice in the last six years they have reached the last 16 of the Champions League and they have claimed many a prize continental scalp (Manchester United, Chelsea, Bayern Munich and Juventus). They will be under pressure to do themselves justice this year in a competition for which the media company of new club president Bernhard Burgener used to have marketing rights.

In control...Luca Zuffi

● TACTICS
The nuts and bolts of Wicky's grand design are a constructive, attacking style of play, a possession-based game and tactical flexibility with or without the ball. He says he is not a systems coach – "Tactical variations are like fashions: they come and go" – and rather than doling out masses of pre-match instructions to players, he prefers to let them find their own way, to offer them as much freedom as possible. Prior to the retirement of Argentinian playmaker Delgado, Wicky was thinking about using the 34-year-old as a deep-lying "quarterback" in a 3-1-4-2 system. Without him, FCB could opt to go 3-4-1-2, 4-2-3-1 or 4-1-4-1 in Europe. "That's only the floor plan," says Wicky.



KEY MAN
Ricky Van Wolfswinkel, Dutch marksman who arrived this summer from Vitesse.

SECRET WEAPON
Kevin Bua (above), fit and firing again after injuries.

YOUNG GUN
Dominik Schmid, classy attacking midfielder. Son of a banker.

3-4-1-2

CSKA MOSCOW

Red Army club still relying on the Old Guard

Can keeper Igor Akinfeev recover from major mistakes?
Akinfeev has been number one for both CSKA and the national team for more than a decade, but the keeper made crucial mistakes which ruined Russia's hopes at the 2014 World Cup and the 2017 Confederations Cup. With CSKA having no real substitute, any instability could cause real problems in defence.

Will CSKA finally sign a top forward?
The club which once boasted some of the best strikers in the Russian league lacks big talent up front these day. Fans' favourites Vagner Love and Seydou Doumbia are no longer with the club, and while Vitinho and Fyodor Chalov may eventually fill the gap, it will be difficult to progress in the Champions League without a quality forward.

Will CSKA and Spartak followers cause problems when they travel to England?
The two rival groups may find themselves in close proximity when CSKA's "red-blue warriors" go to Manchester on December 5 and Spartak's "gladiators" visit Liverpool on December 6.

Exciting...Alan Dzagoev

● TACTICS
What looks like a five-man defence is actually a three-man formation, with full-backs Mario Fernandes and Georgi Shchennikov actively advancing forward and even scoring. The central defence is still built around the old guard of twin brothers Vasili and Aleksei Berezutski. Sergei Ignashevich, at 36, is also an option while Kirill Nababkin may appear on the flanks. Vitinho often joins Chalov as the second striker, assisted by Alan Dzagoev and Aleksandr Golovin. CSKA's game is controlled from midfield by the strong and merciless Swedish holding player Pontus Wernbloom. Set-piece expert Bibras Natkho gives coach Viktor Goncharenko another option in the centre.

KEY MAN
Alan Dzagoev, inventive playmaker now recovered from injury.

SECRET WEAPON
Alexander Golovin, the country's best midfielder.

YOUNG GUN
Fyodor Chalov (above), just 19 but already first-choice striker.

5-4-1

BAYERN MUNICH

Determined to make amends for last season

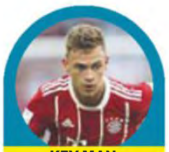
How to cope without Lewandowski?
Bayern boast two elite performers in almost every position. The exception is at central striker, where there is no like-for-like alternative to Robert Lewandowski. Coach Carlo Ancelotti has used Thomas Muller in that role, though he is clearly more comfortable in a freewheeling brief.

How safe is "Carletto"?
Since arriving in Munich a year ago, Ancelotti's credit levels have shrunk and last season's solitary piece of silverware – the Bundesliga title – is regarded as the bare minimum at the Allianz Arena. This season he has the support of ex-Bayern players Willy Sagnol and Hasan Salihamidzic, who took over as assistant coach and director of sport respectively.

Will they improve in Europe?
Bayern are defined by the Champions League and though they were a little unfortunate to lose to Real Madrid at the quarter-final stage last spring the fact remains it was their earliest exit in six years. Ancelotti, the architect of three Champions League triumphs with Milan and Real Madrid, is under huge pressure to put that right.

Prolific...Robert Lewandowski

● TACTICS
Whether deploying 4-3-3 or 4-2-3-1, Ancelotti will look for more collective coherence than last season, when the team tended to rely more on individual brilliance. While they are as dangerous as ever going forward – with the tone usually set by Lewandowski and Franck Ribery – defensively they are not always as compact as they should be and can be guilty of not picking up midfield runners. In a 4-3-3 shape, the watchword will be dynamism, with box-to-box midfielders Arturo Vidal and new boy Corentin Tolisso let off the leash. If looking for more control, Ancelotti will probably plump for a 4-2-3-1 set-up that is likely to incorporate the distribution skills of Spain international Thiago Alcantara.



KEY MAN
Robert Lewandowski, Polish striker is irreplaceable.

SECRET WEAPON
Joshua Kimmich (above), relentless drive and adventure at right-back.

YOUNG GUN
Niklas Sule, 21-year-old stopper bought from Hoffenheim.

4-3-3

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN

Qatari owners will demand success

Can PSG win the Champions League?
Domestic success is all well and good, but PSG's Qatari owners are impatient to lift the Champions League trophy. Coach Unai Emery had a tricky first season in charge and knows he has to deliver this term. The money men pulled out all the stops to get Neymar to the French capital so the pressure is well and truly on.

Can Neymar hit the ground running?
The Brazilian's move from Barcelona served notice that PSG have the muscle and pulling power to wrestle such a player away from a footballing institution. Bitter legal wrangling has already started between the two clubs, but his early form in France suggests he'll be a big success.

Could PSG's best signing be sporting director Antero Henrique?
The 49-year-old Portuguese arrived in June with a sky-high reputation, having been responsible for bringing on young talent at Porto, where he started work in the ticket office. He was instrumental in developing the careers of players such as Hulk, Radamel Falcao and Alex Sandro and will be a hugely influential figure in the future at PSG.

Adventurous... full-back Dani Alves

● TACTICS
PSG have more often than not opted for a 4-3-3 system in recent times and it looks like they will stick with the same shape this campaign. The starting XI appears settled, with three forwards who will terrify most of Europe's defences. Neymar is clearly the side's most potent attacking weapon, and while he likes to switch flanks, expect PSG's left side to pose the biggest threat. Full-back Layvin Kurzawa will get to the byline to whip balls in for Uruguayan goal-machine Edinson Cavani. Javier Pastore could come into the three-man midfield at any time and 22-year-old Presnel Kimpembe will provide the necessary cover in defence. Emery prefers Alphonse Areola in goal ahead of Kevin Trapp.

KEY MAN
Neymar, the £200m man.

SECRET WEAPON
Goncalo Guedes, Portuguese winger who'll be an asset off the bench.

YOUNG GUN
Adrien Rabiot (above), important now that Blaise Matuidi has gone to Juventus.

4-3-3

ANDERLECHT

No longer the force of old

Can they end an early-season crisis?
A few months after collecting their 34th league title, *Les Mauves* began their new domestic campaign in abject fashion, picking up just four points from a possible 12 with disjointed, sterile performances. It has been their worst start to a season since 1998 and some feel they have lost their hunger and become complacent.

How thick is coach Rene Weiler's skin?
Despite winning the title in his first year, Weiler was criticised last term for his side's lack of panache and he is under attack again for not getting the best out of new midfield regulator Sven Kums, a former Belgian Player of the Year who was with Watford last term.

Has the notion of being a "selling club" taken root?
The days when Anderlecht were a major European force are long gone and only three times in the last decade have they competed in the Champions League proper, winning just two games in the process. Their best players invariably fly the nest at the first opportunity, with midfield starlet Youri Tielemans snapped up by Monaco this summer.

Leader... Lukasz Teodorczyk

● TACTICS
Weiler alternates between a 4-2-3-1 and 4-3-3 with the choice of shape a classic risk versus reward assessment: beefing up his midfield on their travels and adopting a more adventurous approach at home. The Swiss coach believes the game is all about dominating in duels, defending with discipline and winning the ball. His side is powerful and athletic, and can plug gaps and restrict space at the back. Their problems this season have been in midfield, with a lack of creativity. One thing they must do is give more of the ball to would-be conductor Kums. Polish striker Lukasz Teodorczyk leads the line, ably backed up by skipper Sofiane Hanni and Henry Onyekuru, who is currently on loan from Everton.

KEY MAN
Sven Kums (above), deep-lying playmaker who can pick a pass.

SECRET WEAPON
Alexandru Chipciu, Romanian wide midfielder, perpetual motion.

YOUNG GUN
Henry Onyekuru, talented African winger or centre-forward.

4-2-3-1

CELTIC

Hoops dream of the last 16

Can Brendan Rodgers uncover the real deal in "expensive bargains"?
The acquisition of midfielder Olivier Ntcham from Manchester City for £4.5m was Celtic's most expensive signing for 10 years and underlines boss Rodgers' desire to attract quality to Parkhead. He struck gold last year by getting Moussa Dembele for £500,000 from Fulham.

Can Celtic Park become a fortress?
These days opponents are inspired by the atmosphere at Celtic Park rather than intimidated by it. Celtic took only one point at home in last season's group stage and Rodgers insists that the supporters are now more patient, having "bought into our way of playing".

Can Celtic reach the last 16?
Neil Lennon did it in 2012-13 and Gordon Strachan did it twice, in 2007 and 2008, and Rodgers is convinced that his players have learned lessons from last season's exceedingly tough group. Celtic may not have the money of the continent's wealthy elite but they do have a trophy in the cabinet – the European Cup from 1967 – and that ensures there is a reputation to be fought for.

Inspiring...Celtic Park

● TACTICS
Now in his second season, Rodgers knows his Celtic players inside-out and they delivered an unbeaten domestic season by being truly adaptable. Although Rodgers' preferred system is 4-2-3-1, he has gone with a back three during matches to cope with injury. For example, Callum McGregor dropped out of midfield in the Scottish Cup Final and into the left-back slot when Kieran Tierney fractured a cheek. The insistence on just one striker meant Leigh Griffiths was on the bench as Dembele was flying, but he is back in the side as the Frenchman is injured. If Scott Sinclair and Patrick Roberts push up the strike force can become a front three, while Tom Rogic is a playmaker with a great shot.

KEY MAN
Scott Sinclair (above), re-juvenated Englishman with pace and goals.

SECRET WEAPON
Scott Brown, midfield ball winner.

YOUNG GUN
Calvin Miller, teenager converted from striker to left-back.

4-2-3-1

CHELSEA

Lack of depth may be a problem

Who calls the shots these days?
Italian manager Antonio Conte signed an improved two-year contract during the summer, but rumours still persist of strained relations with director Marina Granovskaia, who is the key channel to owner Roman Abramovich, and sporting director Michael Emenalo.

Can Chelsea compete on two fronts?
Although they walked away with the Premier League in Conte's first season, it was the club's first campaign in 20 years with no midweek European commitment. New recruits Alvaro Morata, Antonio Rudiger and Tiemoue Bakayoko have added quality, but the summer departure of Nemanja Matic and the continued stand-off with Diego Costa have raised concerns that the squad lacks depth.

Will any youngsters get a chance?
This summer Chelsea sold a number of talented youngsters, including Nathaniel Chalobah (Watford), Dominic Solanke (Liverpool) and Bertrand Traore (Lyon). Others, such as Ruben Loftus-Cheek (Crystal Palace) and Kurt Zouma (Stoke City) are among 26 (and counting) currently out on loan.

Attacking threat ...Victor Moses

● TACTICS
The successful switch to a back three defined Conte's stewardship last season, with wing-backs Marcos Alonso and Victor Moses providing added attacking threats. There are new options in defence with Rudiger's arrival from Roma – who he will meet again in this group – and the return from an extended Bundesliga loan of Andreas Christensen compensating for John Terry's departure to Aston Villa. The versatile Cesar Azpilicueta can also switch to either side of David Luiz, while Bakayoko is likely to partner N'Golo Kante in central midfield, although Cesc Fabregas is also likely to feature. Costa's absence has given Michy Batshuayi a chance to challenge Morata for a starting place up front.

KEY MAN
Eden Hazard, mercurial attacker takes the team to a higher level.

SECRET WEAPON
Pedro (above), experienced campaigner on the bench.

YOUNG GUN
Andreas Christensen, back from loan at Gladbach.

3-4-2-1

ATLETICO MADRID

Transfer embargo has big impact

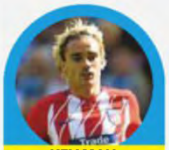
Can they manage to stay in the hunt until January?
The transfer embargo imposed by FIFA for signing under-age players runs until January 2018. By then, Atletico hope to have re-signed Diego Costa from Chelsea and will also be able to recall midfielder Vitolo, who joined from Sevilla this summer and was loaned to Las Palmas.

How will Atletico adapt to life in their new stadium?
Diego Simeone's side are due to play their first competitive game in their new Wanda Metropolitano stadium in mid-September after leaving Vicente Calderon, their home for the past 51 years. The first Champions League game in the 67,000-seat arena is against Chelsea on September 27.

Will Simeone give youth a chance?
The transfer embargo forced the club to divert summer transfer resources into contract extensions for the likes of Saul Niguez, Antoine Griezmann, Koke and Lucas Hernandez. A major concern for Simeone is an ageing defence, where Sime Vrsaljko is challenging right-back Juanfran, while 34-year-old midfielder Gabi is in his sixth season as skipper.

Decisions...Diego Simeone

● TACTICS
The transfer embargo means that there is a settled feel to Simeone's preferred 4-4-2 formation. In Jan Oblak and Diego Godin, Atletico have a top-class keeper and centre-back, but the coach has yet to settle on a regular partner for Godin, with Jose Gimenez, Hernandez and Stefan Savic all vying for a starting place. Gimenez has also been used in the holding midfield role where Thomas Partey is also a long-term option. Midfielder Saul was outstanding for Spain in this summer's European Under-21 Championship, while striker Kevin Gameiro is still recovering from surgery. Nicolas Gaitan, Angel Correa and Lucas Vietto are interesting attacking options from the subs' bench.



KEY MAN
Antoine Griezmann (above), emerging as a truly global star and showed loyalty to remain with the club this summer.

SECRET WEAPON.
Angel Correa, exciting option on the bench.

YOUNG GUN
Lucas Hernandez, outstanding French under-21 defender.

4-4-2

ROMA

Poor European run needs to end

Can Roma make their mark in Europe this year?
Eliminated by Porto in the qualifiers last season, the year before they were beaten 4-0 on aggregate in the second round by Real Madrid, and the year before that they were thrashed 7-1 by Bayern Munich. And this year, of course, there is no Francesco Totti to call on...

How will they cope with a tough group draw?
Even before the Champions League draw was made some commentators were suggesting that, of the three Italian sides in this year's Champions League, it would be Roma who encounter the biggest problems. For many, a draw which throws them in with Chelsea and Atletico Madrid will only compound that view.

Is Di Francesco the man?
If you had to point to one outstanding, positive consideration about this season's Roma, it would have to be new coach Eusebio Di Francesco. The former Roma and Italy midfielder cut his coaching teeth with five seasons at Sassuolo, where he won Serie A promotion before qualifying for the Europa League.

Prolific...Edin Dzeko (centre)

TACTICS
Roma's new sporting director Monchi made a steady if unspectacular impact in the transfer market during the summer. A few of the new signings – Mexican defender Hector Moreno (PSV), Serb defender Aleksandar Kolarov (Manchester City) and French striker Gregoire Defrel (Sassuolo) – are likely to feature heavily. Di Francesco has often played with a 4-3-3 formation which, in Roma's case, would see Moreno and Kolarov in the back four; Radja Nainggolan, Daniele De Rossi and Kevin Strootman in midfield; with Diego Perotti, Edin Dzeko and Defrel up front. Nainggolan is an aggressive, 90-minute ball-winner who also gets forward to regularly score on a regular basis.

KEY MAN
Radja Nainggolan (above), arguably the outstanding Roma player of recent seasons.

SECRET WEAPON:
Edin Dzeko, Serie A's top scorer last season.

YOUNG GUN
Cengiz Under, Turkish forward who was signed this summer.

4-3-3

QARABAG

Azeri history makers

Could the first-timers have been handed a tougher draw?
Qarabag are the first Azeri team to compete in the group stage of the Champions League following their victory over Copenhagen in the final qualifying round. But they now face an almost impossible task in a group with Atletico Madrid, Roma and Chelsea.

Will international experience count for anything?
The club forms the backbone of Azerbaijan's national team and a recent World Cup qualifier against Northern Ireland featured seven Qarabag players, including Brazilian-born midfielder Richard Almeida, who made his debut after being granted Azeri citizenship.

What is the club's background?
The club is originally from Agdam in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region but was forced into exile in 1993 following the bloody conflict with Armenia. They now play their European matches to sell-out crowds at the 32,000-capacity Tofiq Bahramov national stadium in Baku. Since 2001, they have been heavily backed by the state-owned food company Azersun.

Solid...Qarabag keep out Copenhagen

TACTICS
Coach Qurban Qurbanov was one of Azerbaijan's biggest stars during his playing days and he has been in charge of Qarabag for the past nine years. During that time they have become established as the country's leading club and supporters have dubbed the team the "Barcelona of the Caucasus" thanks to their possession-based game. Qurbanov's side will operate a defensive 4-5-1 set-up in Europe, although they will have the option to quickly switch to a much more attack-minded 4-3-3 formation when in possession. South African national-team striker Dino Ndlovu has already scored four goals in the qualifying rounds of this season's competition and opponents must keep an eye on him.

KEY MAN
Dino Ndlovu, South African striker and the team's main source of goals.

SECRET WEAPON
Richard Almeida, Brazilian-born free-kick specialist.

YOUNG GUN
Mahir Madatov (above), scorer of the decisive goal against Copenhagen in Baku.

4-5-1

JUVENTUS

Europe likely to be main focus

Can they lay the ghosts of last term?
Under coach Max Allegri, there has been impressive progress, both as a club and a team, with Juve reaching two of the last three Champions League Finals and establishing their position on the front row of the European starting grid. However, did the comprehensive nature of their second half collapse in Cardiff to Real Madrid leave any psychological scars?

Will they save all their best efforts for the Champions League?
What's another *scudetto*, when you've won the last six? The group ties with Barcelona, the side they eliminated in the quarter-finals last season and against whom they lost the 2015 Final in Berlin, may reveal much.

Is there life after Bonucci and Alves?
Even if Juve have a stellar attack, based around the white-hot talent of Gonzalo Higuain and Paulo Dybala, the strength of this side has always been its defence. This season, however, Juve are without two key defenders in experienced Brazilian Dani Alves (now with PSG) and long-time central defensive pillar Leonardo Bonucci (now at Milan).

White-hot... Gonzalo Higuain

● TACTICS
For now at least, it seems extremely likely that Allegri will stick with the tried and tested 4-2-3-1 set-up which served him so well last year. In this format, Sami Khedira and Miralem Pjanic will sit in front of the defence, while Dybala, flanked by Douglas Costa and Mario Mandzukic, plays behind lone ranger Higuain. The purchase of French midfielder Blaise Matuidi from Paris Saint-Germain gives Allegri the option of varying this module, and he could incorporate the newcomer in a 4-3-2-1 formation. Mehdi Benatia, or maybe on-loan Benedikt Howedes, is likely to replace Bonucci. Other newcomers Federico Bernardeschi and Rodrigo Betancur will also hope to be given some game time in Europe.

KEY MAN
Paulo Dybala (above), a potent attacking force, also provides the ammunition for Higuain.

SECRET WEAPON
Douglas Costa, could provide vital pace and mobility.

YOUNG GUN
Moise Kean, Ivorian-Italian teenager.

4-2-3-1

BARCELONA

A club in transition under new boss

Have Barca ever had a more chaotic summer than this one?
The club hierarchy was powerless to prevent Neymar joining Paris Saint-Germain after they triggered his release clause. The club were then stonewalled by Liverpool over Philippe Coutinho and held to ransom by Borussia Dortmund over Ousmane Dembele.

When will Barca field La Masia graduates again?
The €105m purchase of Dembele and €40m signing of Paulinho represented coach Ernesto Valverde's desire for power and physicality over technique. It coincided with highly-rated youth graduate Sergi Samper being loaned out to Las Palmas.

Can they close the gap on rivals Real Madrid?
The Spanish Super Cup defeat by Real Madrid exposed the gulf between the two rivals. The front three of Messi-Suarez-Neymar kept Barca in touch, but Neymar has gone, injured Luis Suarez missed the start of the season and Lionel Messi is yet to sign a contract. On January 1, Messi and Andres Iniesta can talk to other clubs.

Old guard...Luis Suarez (left) and Lionel Messi

● TACTICS
Valverde, who arrived from Athletic Bilbao this summer, spent two seasons as a player at Camp Nou and played alongside Pep Guardiola in the late 1980s. He has experimented with a back three, with Javier Mascherano joining Gerard Pique and Samuel Umtiti as the third centre-back. Summer signing Nelson Semedo brings new options down the right flank, while Valverde must decide who makes way in midfield for Paulinho. As ever, so much depends on Messi (in a World Cup year) and the fitness of Suarez. A big problem for the club is they have still yet to find a replacement for Xavi, with lots of cash spent on underperforming midfielders such as Arda Turan and Andre Gomes.

KEY MAN
Lionel Messi, keeping everything together.

SECRET WEAPON
Paco Alcacer (above), expected to provide goals from the bench.

YOUNG GUN
Ousmane Dembele, record signing from Dortmund and replaces Neymar.

4-3-3

OLYMPIAKOS

Eager to do themselves justice

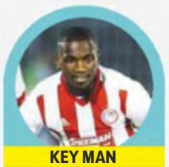
Is replacing Retsos impossible?
The Piraeus club were hoping to retain 19-year-old defensive all-rounder Panagiotis Retsos for at least another couple of years, but a €15m offer, plus 20 per cent of any sell-on fee, from Bundesliga side Bayer Leverkusen means he will almost certainly depart.

Can coach Hasi deliver?
Last season, Olympiakos went through no fewer than three coaches and while new boss Besnik Hasi deserves credit for qualifying for the group stage, the Kosovo-Albanian will not last long if results are not forthcoming. The word is that he was only ever a fall-back choice, with owner Evangelos Marinakis preferring Pedro Martins of Portuguese side Vitoria Guimares.

How to ensure they are not Greeks bearing gifts ?
About to appear in their 18th Champions League group phase, Olympiakos need to start doing themselves justice and they will be anxious not to be humiliated by the likes of Barca and Juve. After missing out last season, they feel they are back where they belong. Now to prove it.

Success... celebrating against Partizan in the qualifiers

TACTICS
Normally using a 4-2-3-1, Hasi's side will be meticulously organised, with every player knowing precisely what his duties are. For Hasi, tactical discipline, industry and self-sacrifice are the Holy Trinity. Although his sides are workmanlike, he always likes to keep a couple of flair players up his sleeve and he has two such artists in attacking midfielder Kostas Fortounis and German winger Marko Marin. The main men, however, are the two defensive midfielders and it's no coincidence that a trio of enforcers were brought in this summer. The position of lone striker has yet to be definitively assigned as new signings Emmanuel Emenike and Ben Nabouhane both have their strengths.



KEY MAN
Kostas Fortounis, skilful number 10.

SECRET WEAPON
Ben Nabouhane (above), lively front runner who plays his international football for Comoros.

YOUNG GUN
Leonardo Koutris, talented left-back recently bought from Giannina.

4-2-3-1

SPORTING

Argentinian influx could be a big help

Can Fabio Coentrao find his mojo?
Plagued by injury at Real Madrid, the left-back controversially signed for Sporting, having previously stated he would only ever play in Portugal again if it was for his previous club Benfica. Still searching for full fitness, a positive season may get him on the plane to the Russia World Cup.

Can Jesus restore his reputation?
The charismatic 63-year-old Jorge Jesus played a huge part in restoring Benfica to the top of the tree in Portugal before sensationally switching to Sporting in the summer of 2015. However, things have been far tougher for him in the green half of Lisbon. After coming close to ending Sporting's 15-year wait for a title in his first season, last year's campaign was a disaster. As Portugal's highest paid coach, far better is expected this term.

Will the Argentinian axis prove to be a success?
There are four Argentinian imports set to be playing big roles. Midfielders Rodrigo Battaglia and Marcos Acuna impressed in the early season, while Jonathan Silva and Alan Ruiz are also hoping to make a name for themselves in Europe.

Controversial ...Fabio Coentrao

TACTICS
No matter who the opposition are, coach Jesus very rarely moves aways from his default 4-4-2 formation. Bas Dost will be the focal point of Sporting's attack after a fantastic debut season in Portugal, in which he scored 36 goals. To back him up there is an array of possibilities for the role of support striker: the diminutive Daniel Podence, the bullish Seydou Doumbia or the cultured Ruiz. Midfield is probably the team's strong point, with expensive newcomers Bruno Fernandes and Acuna already looking to be fine investments. Livewire winger Gelson Martins provides creativity and unpredictability wide right, and the centre-back pairing of Jeremy Mathieu and Sebastian Coates is solid.

KEY MAN
Gelson Martins (above), yet another brilliant winger out of Sporting.

SECRET WEAPON
Daniel Podence, small in stature, big in talent.

YOUNG GUN
Gelson Dala, exciting Angolan striker.

4-4-2

SPARTAK MOSCOW

Coach must solve early-season problems

Is this a new era for Spartak?
Last season the 22-times national champions won their first Russian title for 16 years. They boast a new state-of-the-art arena and are sponsored by one of Russia's most powerful companies, Lukoil. However, early season defeats – 5-1 to Zenit, 2-1 to CSKA, 4-3 to Lokomotiv – left coach Massimo Carrera lamenting that some of last season's heroes "have not finished their bottles of champagne".

Will Carrera survive?
The Italian turned things around quickly after the team's poor results in the Europa League qualifiers last season, uniting the team, lifting morale and restoring the fans' confidence. He agreed a new contract until May 2019 but this season's poor start may jeopardize his future, especially if things go wrong in the Champions League. Spartak have had 13 coaches in as many years.

Will Zobnin fully recover?
Roman Zobnin combines the holding role with fast, inventive box-to-box play, but he suffered a ligament injury after twisting his knee while playing for Russia against Hungary in June and is still recovering.

Passion...Spartak and Zenit players clash in an early season game

● TACTICS
Carrera's default set-up involves two banks of four, although neither of his two attacking full-backs is particularly impressive when it comes to their defensive duties. Newcomer Georgi Dzhikiya, who recently made his debut for Russia's national side is becoming something of a key figure at centre-back, while Zobnin's usual midfield partner, the captain Denis Glushakov, has yet to regain last season's form. Fernando, Jano Ananidze, Ivelin Popov and Mario Pasalic remain alternative midfield options. Wide midfielders Quincy Promes and Aleksandr Samedov like to attack from the flanks, while striker Lorenzo Melgarejo has proved to be effective coming off the bench.

KEY MAN
Quincy Promes (above), Dutch playmaker who is always among the goals.

SECRET WEAPON
Mario Pasalic, summer arrival on loan from Chelsea.

YOUNG GUN
Aleksandr Selikhov, undisputed first-choice keeper.

4-4-2

SEVILLA

Europa League specialists start at top table

Is there life after Monchi?
There were big changes at the Sanchez Pizjuan this summer, not least with long-standing sporting director Monchi moving to Roma and Eduardo Berizzo switching from Celta Vigo to replace Jorge Sampaoli as coach.

How will they cope with so many ins and outs this summer?
There have been big summer changes under Monchi's successor as sporting director, Oscar Arias. While the departure of Vitolo to Atletico Madrid (via Las Palmas) was controversial, there were lots of positive arrivals: Simon Kjaer and Sebastien Corchia in defence, Luis Muriel and Nolito up front, and the returning Jesus Navas and Ever Banega in midfield.

Can Sevilla make the step up to the Champions League?
After five victories in the UEFA Cup/ Europa League, including three in the last four years, Sevilla were in danger of being labelled Europa League specialists. But they made the last 16 of last season's Champions League and came through a qualifier against Istanbul Basaksehir this season, winning 4-3 on aggregate.

Returniung...Jesus Navas

● TACTICS
New coach Berizzo was a player under Marcelo Bielsa at Newell's Old Boys in Argentina and also worked with him as an assistant coach of the Chile national side. Not surprisingly, his sides follow the Bielsa template of attack-minded, high-risk football, with heavy pressing and quick incisive passing. Kjaer should prove a more than adequate replacement for Marseille-bound centre-half Adil Rami, while Colombian Luis Muriel (Sampdoria) and Nolito (reunited with Berizzo from their time at Celta) should provide competition to lone striker Wissam Ben Yedder. Danish midfielder Michael Krohn-Dehli can fit in where required, but N'Zonzi is the main man, patrolling the area in front of the back four.

KEY MAN
Steven N'Zonzi (above), dynamic former Stoke midfielder.

SECRET WEAPON
Paulo Henrique Ganzo, Brazilian desperate to make his mark.

YOUNG GUN
Borja Lasso, winger recently promoted to the first team.

4-1-4-1

LIVERPOOL

Anfield awaits more big European nights

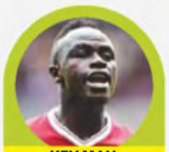
Who needs Coutinho?
Brazilian Philippe Coutinho was absent from Liverpool's early season games as the club continued its stand-off with Barcelona over his transfer, and in his absence – notably in the Champions League qualifiers against Hoffenheim – the front three of Sadio Mane, Roberto Firmino and summer signing Mohamed Salah performed exceptionally well.

Can Liverpool compete on two fronts?
Jurgen Klopp steered Liverpool back into the Champions League in his first full season in charge but last year the German benefitted from a lack of European competition. Liverpool will enjoy the advantage of a lively atmosphere at Anfield on European nights but the Champions League campaign will stretch Klopp's squad.

Can Klopp sort out the team's defensive problems?
Throughout the summer, Liverpool were desperate to sign Southampton's Virgil Van Dijk in a bid to shore up a leaky defence. Klopp does appear to have opted for Simon Mignolet ahead of Loris Karius as his first-choice keeper.

Fine start...Mohamed Salah (centre) after scoring against Watford

TACTICS
The summer stand-off over Coutinho with Barcelona may have occupied the headlines, but the Brazilian's absence on the pitch had little effect on Klopp's heavy pressing strategy. With his favoured 4-1-4-1 or 4-3-3 set-up, Jordan Henderson anchors the midfield, allowing Emre Can and Georginio Wijnaldum to push further forward, while the versatile James Milner – who played full-back last season – and new signing Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain offer other options. Adam Lallana will also press for a starting place when he returns from injury. Up front, any one of Firmino, Mane or Salah can play the lone striker role if required, while the livewire Daniel Sturridge will also be in contention.



KEY MAN
Sadio Mane (above), quick, dangerous and the side's biggest goalscoring threat.

SECRET WEAPON
Daniel Sturridge, injury-hit striker now ready to return.

YOUNG GUN
Trent Alexander-Arnold, teenage full-back who may get a chance.

4-3-3

MARIBOR

Underdogs looking for another upset

Are Maribor on a hiding to nothing?
Darko Milanic's side maybe the dominant team in Slovenian football, winning seven of the past nine league titles, but they only just squeezed past teams from Bosnia, Faroe Islands and Israel to take their place in the group stage.

Can they pick up a first-ever win in the Champions League group stage?
The Slovenians are competing at this stage of the tournament for only the second time in their history. On their first appearance, in 2014-15, they failed to win a single game and were thrashed 6-0 at Stamford Bridge by Chelsea. However, they did hold out for a draw at home to the Premier League side when veteran keeper Jasmin Handanovic saved Eden Hazard's penalty.

Can Milanic cut it as a coach on the European stage?
He may have lasted just 32 days as manager of Leeds United in 2014, having been a surprise appointment by owner Massimo Cellino, but Milanic has previous experience of the Europa League, from his first spell with Maribor and from his time with Austria's Sturm Graz.

Squeeze...Martin Milec (right) in action against Israeli side Hapoel Be'er Sheva

TACTICS
Maribor lined up in a 4-2-3-1 formation in the qualifying rounds of the tournament but the reality of the group stage mean they will adopt a safety-first 4-5-1. The veteran Brazilian and club stalwart Tavares is the likely first-choice striker, with youngster Zahovic seemingly his second-half replacement. Bosnian striker Jasmin Mesanovic, signed from Zrinjski in the close season, could also feature, with Tavares dropping into midfield. Blaz Vrhovec and the Israeli Marwan Kabha play the defensive midfield roles, with Dino Hotic, Gregor Bajde and Albanian Valon Ahmedi looking to hit opponents on the counter-attack. Goalscoring midfielder Damjan Bohar is an option from the bench.

KEY MAN
Marcos Tavares, club's Brazilian-born all-time top scorer.

SECRET WEAPON
Mitja Viler, (above) goalscoring left-back and free-kick specialist.

YOUNG GUN
Luka Zahovic, son of Slovenian hero Zlatko Zahovic.

4-5-1

SHAKHTAR DONETSK

Fonseca still relies on Lucescu's old proven fighters

Is transfer inactivity a problem?
Shakhtar won the Ukraine Premier League for the first time in three seasons, but did not strengthen over the summer. Portuguese coach Paulo Fonseca still relies on those players, mainly from Brazil, who were signed by his predecessor Mircea Lucescu.

Can Fonseca succeed without reinforcements?
At the start of this season, Fonseca had serious problems with the motivation of his leading players. Marlos and Taison face little competition for places in the starting XI and their performances have suffered as a result.

What would be a good European campaign?
The club do not expect to get to the knock-out stage and the deterioration in the quality of their domestic league is undoubtedly a factor. Players may struggle to switch from the slow speeds of the Ukrainian championship to the frantic rhythm of matches in the Champions League. Third place in the group and a chance to participate in the Europa League would be a real achievement.

First choice...Marlos

● TACTICS
Fonseca prefers to employ a 4-5-1 system in which a dominant role is given to the team's attacking wide men: Darijo Srna and Marlos on the right, Ismaily and Bernard on the left. These four are relied upon to organise speedy counter-attacks and feed lone Argentinian striker Facundo Ferreyra. Brazilian international wizard Taison plays behind him and adds plenty of unpredictability – sometimes even for his own team-mates. The promising Viktor Kovalenko is just 21 but is another quality option for a role in attacking midfield. Taras Stepanenko is indispensable in the position of the holding defensive midfielder, while Fred provides balance in central midfield.

KEY MAN
Darijo Srna (above), vastly experienced leader.

SECRET WEAPON
Fred, midfield marshal now back in action after a long disqualification.

YOUNG GUN
Ivan Petryak, skilful creative midfielder, already a Ukraine international.

4-5-1

MANCHESTER CITY

Pressure on Guardiola after summer signings

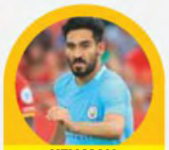
Will any club ever spend as much on defenders as City did this summer?
A new keeper (Ederson) and three full-backs (Benjamin Mendy, Kyle Walker and Danilo) cost £152m. Boss Pep Guardiola will hope Ederson proves an adequate replacement for the exiled Joe Hart while the full-backs will offer him some much-needed dynamism on the flanks.

Now that Guardiola has his players, can he deliver?
Last year was the first trophy-less season in his coaching career. The new arrivals mean that he now has similar quality to his squads at Barcelona and Bayern Munich, so the pressure is on.

How will UEFA view City's latest spending spree?
City's only European trophy was the 1970 Cup-winners Cup and success in the Champions League remains the yardstick for the club's Abu Dhabi owners. However, City have only gone beyond the last 16 once – in 2016, when they lost to Real Madrid in the semis. Their recent spending of £200m and counting is likely to put City back on UEFA's Financial Fairplay radar.

Flexible...Pep Guardiola

● TACTICS
Flexibility is the key for Guardiola and early games suggest a 3-3-2-2 set-up which easily becomes 5-3-2 or 3-5-2. A three-man central defence will depend on the fitness of captain Vincent Kompany. Given the money spent on defence, City are still short at centre-back, with Eliaquim Mangala the only senior back-up, though Fernandinho could drop back, with Yaya Toure coming into central midfield. There are plenty of options in attack, where Bernardo Silva or Raheem Sterling can replace forwards or wide midfielders. Fabian Delph, Ilkay Gundogan and Leroy Sane are other midfield options. Claudio Bravo is the back-up between the posts after City let Willy Caballero join Chelsea.



KEY MAN
David Silva, a crucial midfield orchestrator.

SECRET WEAPON
Ilkay Gundogan (about), German midfielder back in contention after injury last season.

YOUNG GUN
Phil Foden, 17-year-old was a revelation in pre-season.

3-3-2-2

NAPOLI

Settled side happy with the draw

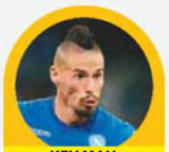
Have the team learned from last season's experiences?
When Lorenzo Insigne put Napoli ahead against Real Madrid at the Bernabeu in February, the immediate thought was: would Napoli have the steel, solidity and experience to survive the inevitable fierce Real reaction? In truth, they did not. The Spanish side equalised within 10 minutes before going on to win the game 3-1, and eventually the tie 6-2 on aggregate.

Does the draw make a difference?
Given that coach Maurizio Sarri will be fielding mostly the same squad as last season, it is difficult to see why Napoli should do any better this year. However, they do have a decent draw and their qualifying-round performance when beating Nice 4-0 on aggregate was mightily impressive.

Is this the year to expect fireworks from Insigne?
For a long time now the striker has looked like one of the potential greats of Italian football. His qualifying-round form in the games against Nice would suggest that this could indeed be a very good year for him.

Attacking trio...(from left) Lorenzo Insigne, Dries Mertens and Jose Callejon

● TACTICS
A settled Napoli side have the advantage of coming into this third season under Sarri with a well-oiled 4-3-3 tactical scheme in which the Brazilian midfield duo of Allen and Jorghino, along with Slovakia's Marek Hamsik, provide the platform for the talented attacking trio of Insigne, Dries Mertens of Belgium and Jose Callejon of Spain. As ever, Hamsik is regarded as more important than anyone else in the line-up. Always in the action, the 30-year-old makes his presence felt both as a midfield worker and as someone who gets forward to score on a regular basis. The team's Polish connection – striker Arkadiusz Milik and midfielder Piotr Zielinski – can both make a big impact from the bench.



KEY MAN
Marek Hamsik (above), all-action Slovak schemer who makes his team tick.

SECRET WEAPON
Arkadiusz Milik, Polish striker now back in action after a long spell out with injury.

YOUNG GUN
Marko Rog, versatile Croatian midfielder.

4-3-3

FEYENOORD

New-look side make long-awaited return

Are the new ones just as good?
Feyenoord won their first Dutch title in 18 years last season but paid the price for their success as many key players were snapped up by other clubs. They did some shrewd transfer business – bringing in Kevin Diks, Ridgeciano Haps, Jean-Paul Boetius and Sam Larsson – but is it enough for their first Champions League appearance since 2002?

Who is first-choice keeper?
In Brad Jones and Kenneth Vermeer the Rotterdam club has two number one goalkeepers. Due to injuries, coach Giovanni Van Bronckhorst didn't have to make a judgment last year. This term he must either make a definite choice or rotate the pair.

Will key players stay fit?
Van Bronckhorst is desperate that striker Nicolai Jorgensen and central defenders Eric Botteghin and Jan-Arie Van der Heijden remain fit since he lacks suitable understudies. Up front, Michiel Kramer isn't Champions League material, while relying on injury-prone Sven Van Beek and 20-year-old Jeremiah St Juste in defence would be a huge risk.

Key...Jean-Paul Boetius (left) and Nicolai Jorgensen

● TACTICS
Feyenoord will play a traditional 4-3-3 with wingers Boetius and Steven Berghuis both regularly coming inside. In the recently acquired Larsson they have a more traditional alternative. Striker Jorgensen will be one to watch as he is a prolific goalscorer. Midfield is the engine room of the team, with Karim El Ahmadi in control and Jens Toornstra and Tonny Vilhena as the driving forces. Central defence will be the side's weakest point since Botteghin and Van der Heijden aren't particularly mobile and haven't been tested against world-class opposition. They could be extra vulnerable as full-backs Diks and Haps love to go forward. Jones and Vermeer are both reliable goalkeepers.

KEY MAN
Karim El Ahmadi, Moroccan international who keeps everything ticking in midfield.

SECRET WEAPON
Ridgeciano Haps (above), a future Holland full-back.

YOUNG GUN
Tonny Vilhena, 22-year-old driving force in midfield.

4-3-3

MONACO

Rebuilt side could surprise once again

How will Monaco fare after losing the spine of last year's impressive team?
With Tiemoue Bakayoko, Bernardo Silva and Benjamin Mendy gone, and others such as Kylian Mbappe set to follow, coach Leonardo Jardim had the tough task of rebuilding his team while defending the league title against the might of PSG. As is the Monaco way, players full of potential have been brought in – but will they be able to handle the pressure?

Can Radamel Falcao continue last season's sparkling form?
The Colombian scored 21 goals in 29 games last term and looks set to shoulder the main attacking burden once more.

Can Monaco keep moving forward?
Last season Monaco made the semi-finals, beating Borussia Dortmund and Manchester City along the way. It's hard to imagine a severely reconstructed side matching those exploits. But then again, nobody gave Monaco much of a chance last season either. Their high-intensity attacking game is suited to the Champions League and they could surprise and delight once again.

Team work... coach Leonardo Jardim and Radamel Falcao

● TACTICS
Monaco were the most potent attacking force in Ligue 1 last season, scoring an impressive 107 goals. The 4-4-2 system used by Jardim worked better than even he could have hoped and he seems to be sticking with the system, despite new personnel. Falcao and new boy Adama Diakhaby look set to start up front, while Rachid Ghezzal adds real quality on either flank and new signings Youri Tielemans, Soualiho Meite and Steven Jovetic some quality and competition. Jemerson and Kamil Glik are a solid pairing at the back, with Terence Kongolo looking to break through at centre-back or left-back. Jardim is one of the more tactically astute managers and will marshall his troops effectively.

KEY MAN
Radamel Falcao, veteran striker.

SECRET WEAPON
Rony Lopes (above) attacking Portuguese midfielder.

YOUNG GUN
Youri Tielemans, the 20-year-old Belgian midfielder signed from Anderlecht.

4-4-2

PORTO

Dragons keen to rekindle past glories

Can Sergio Conceicao continue his team's transformation?
Conceicao arrived from Nantes in the summer and has completely changed the playing style. The former Portugal international was a big favourite during his playing days at the Estadio do Dragao and his single-minded attitude is already rubbing off on everyone at the club.

Will Vincent Aboubakar finally fulfil his potential?
The 25-year-old Cameroonian striker showed immense promise after joining Porto in 2014 but after being loaned to Besiktas last term his career in Portugal looked over. However, under Conceicao he looks to have rediscovered his form.

Can Porto restore their once-proud reputation in Europe?
A successful start to the millennium for the club saw them win the UEFA Cup, Champions League and Europa League all within a decade. Having frequently more than held their own against Europe's finest, an extremely bright start to the current campaign has raised hopes that the Dragons can thrive on the continental stage once more.

Potential...Vincent Aboubakar (left) with Moussa Marega

● TACTICS
Conceicao has implemented a 4-4-2 with wide overlapping full-backs on both flanks (Ricardo Pereira and Alex Telles) and two extremely talented inverted wingers that like to cut inside (Yacine Brahimi and Jesus Corona). Playmaker Oliver Torres looks back to his best, while holding midfielder Danilo continues to excel, but in an extremely attacking set-up there are question marks regarding whether Porto's midfield may be overrun against high-quality opposition. Porto have done away with the patient build-up play of former coaches, with the emphasis now on high pressing and constantly being on the front foot. The hope is that this will usher in a fresh and exciting new era after a dismal few years.

KEY MAN
Danilo, the defensive brains in an attacking team.

SECRET WEAPON
Moussa Marega, striker making the most of his second chance at the club.

YOUNG GUN
Oliver Torres (above), only 22 but world-class potential.

4-4-2

BESIKTAS

New signings need to bed in quickly

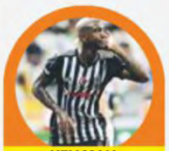
Will the new faces settle in time?
The Turkish champions have made a number of important acquisitions – notably Real Madrid stopper Pepe, Chilean defensive midfielder Gary Medel and Spanish striker Alvaro Negredo – but on early-season form the Black Eagles lack co-ordination. In possession they have looked hesitant, while in defensive mode they are not closing down opponents quickly enough.

Can Senol Gunes work his magic?
After two consecutive Turkish titles and the last eight of the Europa League last term, the 63-year-old ex-Turkey boss is absolutely revered at Vodafone Park. Has somehow dovetailed fierce competition for places with a happy camp.

One step beyond?
Missed out on qualification for the knock-out phase last term by a single point and showed their mettle with a 3-2 victory away at Napoli. Chairman Fikret Orman has set his heart on being involved in the springtime shake-up and to that end he is banking on the Champions League know-how of Pepe, Negredo and former Barcelona full-back Adriano.

Know-how...Alvaro Negredo

● TACTICS
Gunes' default template is a 4-2-3-1 and in home games he will have his side going straight for the jugular, dominating possession and building up an unstoppable head of steam. In terms of goal threat, the danger can come from anywhere: Cenk Tosun or Negredo up front, Ricardo Quaresma, and Ryan Babel on the wings, or Talisca and Oguzhan Ozyakup in midfield. When playing on the break, the all-important figure is Quaresma, who is skilful, fast and pugnacious. Canada's Atiba Hutchinson will compete with Medel for the defensive midfield slot, though the latter could be used alongside Pepe in central defence. They can, however, be opened up by a ball over the top.



KEY MAN
Talisca (above), long-striding surges and goals.

SECRET WEAPON
Cenk Tosun, finishing power with either foot.

YOUNG GUN
Oguzhan Ozyakup, perceptive central midfielder who came through the youth ranks at Arsenal.

4-2-3-1-

RB LEIPZIG

Europe will be the priority

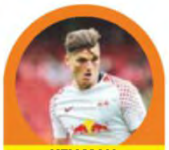
Has constant transfer speculation unsettled their main men?
Turning down huge bids for Naby Keita and Emil Forsberg this summer was a huge statement of intent from the club but it also contains an element of risk if players are unsettled by the speculation. Keita will be off at the end of this season, joining Liverpool after they agreed to pay his £48m release clause.

Can they maintain the momentum?
After sensationally steering promoted RB to the runners-up spot last season, coach Ralph Hasenhuttl's big task this term will be how to deal with the twin-challenges of domestic and European football. But if anyone can make the necessary adjustments, it is the thoughtful Austrian.

Bundesliga or Europe?
Conventional wisdom is that Champions League newcomers tend to put all their eggs in the European basket, prioritising the glamour of the continental stage over the familiar battlegrounds of their own parish. And that may be the case here, with qualification from the group the aim. For a side with an average age of 23.4 years, it will be a steep learning curve.

On his way... Naby Keita

● TACTICS
The key ingredients in Hasenhuttl's set-up are synchronised pressing and blink-of-an-eye transition speed. The team are drilled to press only in specified situations, and if the first wave of ball-hunters does not force the turnover, the second usually does. They boast good technique and intelligence all over the pitch and co-operate excellently as a unit. Keita does it all in the middle of the park, while Forsberg – nominally on the left-flank but with licence to roam – is their chief provider, enjoying an almost telepathic understanding with front-runners Timo Werner and Yussuf Poulsen. Running the opposition off their feet comes easily to Hasenhuttl's team, but it's not exactly an economic style of play.



KEY MAN
Naby Keita, heart, soul and brains of the operation.

SECRET WEAPON
Marcel Sabitzer (above), goalscoring midfielder who is underestimated.

YOUNG GUN
Jean-Kevin Augustin, new striker who was signed from PSG.

4-2-2-2

REAL MADRID

Thirteenth European Cup is the aim

Will anyone match Zidane's trophy haul as a coach?
August's Spanish Super Cup victory over Barcelona means Real have won all seven of the trophies they have competed for since Zinedine Zidane's appointment: two Champions Leagues, two European Super Cups, the Club World Cup, a Spanish Liga title and the Spanish Super Cup.

Can Marco Asensio breakthrough?
The 21-year-old's sensational goal in the Super Cup against Barca announced the arrival of a potential new superstar, and one who cost just a few million from Mallorca – in contrast to the millions being spent by PSG and Barcelona.

Will Madrid ever have a better chance to win a record 13th European Cup?
Madrid are so far ahead of Barcelona and Atletico Madrid in their domestic rivalry that they are unlikely to be distracted from their quest for European success. New signings Dani Ceballos (Real Betis) and Theo Hernandez (Atletico Madrid) have been added to a squad that can comfortably claim to be the world's best, even though they withdrew from a bidding race for Kylian Mbappe.

Sensational...Marco Asensio

● **TACTICS**
Squad rotation has been the key to Zidane's success in his brief time as a coach, with the Frenchman managing to keep all of his players happy so far. Cristiano Ronaldo will inevitably be rested at times, leaving opportunities for the likes of Isco and Asensio, either as one of the front three or as the attacking midfielder in a 4-3-1-2. There should also be opportunities for Spain under-21 midfielder Ceballos and left-back Hernandez. A potential weakness could be central defence where the departure of Pepe, Raphael Varane's injuries and Sergio Ramos' penchant for red cards could leave them short. Casemiro has played there but he is far more effective in central midfield.

KEY MAN
Casemiro (above), Brazilian who holds the midfield and protects the defence so others can prosper.

SECRET WEAPON
Marco Asensio, a potential global superstar.

YOUNG GUN
Theo Hernandez, exciting young left-back.

4-3-3

BORUSSIA DORTMUND

New boss Bosz brings calm

Will a summer of distractions and setbacks take their toll?
It was a close season of head-spinning turmoil with the sacking of coach Thomas Tuchel, several key players beginning long periods of rehab, the on-off transfer of marksman Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and the loss of French forward Ousmane Dembele to Bareclona.

Will new boss Bosz settle quickly?
Although not the first-choice to replace Tuchel – that was Lucien Favre – Peter Bosz, who was previously coach of Ajax, looks a good fit. Youth development and attacking football are the order of the day, and in marked contrast to the grumpy Tuchel his relaxed man-management style is having a positive effect.

Has the bomb attack on the team bus last season had any lasting effect?
The players were unhappy at being forced to play the first leg of their quarter-final against Monaco just 24 hours after the assault. "Unfinished business" is the phrase which comes to mind. In the last five years, they have made the knock-out stage four times and always have the bit between their teeth on European nights.

Relaxed...Peter Bosz (in black)

● **TACTICS**
Bosz's game plan is a mix of his two predecessors' philosophies, combining the whirlwind pressing of Jurgen Klopp with the care in possession encouraged by Tuchel. Without the ball, Bosz's side will press the opposition deep in their own half, while their creative impulses take varied forms: the range of pass of Julian Weigl, the final-third imagination of Mario Gotze, the pace and finishing power of Aubameyang, and the intelligence of teenage forward Christian Pulisic. They keep a very high line defensively, with the fine blend of Sokratis Papastathopoulos' physicality and Marc Bartra's ability to bring the ball out from the back. One potential problem is their susceptibility to swift counter-attacks.

KEY MAN
Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (above), goal machine but is he happy to still be at Dortmund?

SECRET WEAPON
Christian Pulisic, fine football intelligence.

YOUNG GUN:
Mahmoud Dahoud, versatile midfielder signed from Gladbach.

4-3-3

TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR

Wembley woes of past must be overcome

Groundhog day for Spurs?
After last season's disappointment – when they lost out to Monaco and Bayer Leverkusen, and were the only seeded team not to make the last 16 – Tottenham were handed another tough draw.

Will late transfer business backfire on Daniel Levy?
Spurs chairman Levy is famed for running a very tight ship and likes to leave all his transfer business to the last minute. A late deal for record signing Davinson Sanchez from Ajax continued that trend, which could again make life difficult for manager Mauricio Pochettino.

How will Spurs break the Wembley Stadium hoodoo?
Any hope supporters had that the problems encountered when playing European games at Wembley would be less pronounced this season – with all Spurs' home games being staged at the national stadium while White Hart Lane is developed – quickly evaporated following a defeat at the hands of London rivals Chelsea and a draw with Burnley in the club's first two "home" fixtures of their Premier League campaign.

Beaten...Spurs concede against Chelsea this season

● TACTICS
The arrival of Colombian centre-back Sanchez gives coach Pochettino the option of switching to a back three, which is something that he has used on occasion, with Eric Dier also able to play there. However, Spurs began this season playing with a back four that was shielded by Dier playing alongside Mousa Dembele. Victor Wanyama can also add additional steel to central midfield if required. Although more attacking in their play, Moussa Sissoko and Erik Lamela are less consistent options for Pochettino when used from the bench. A big concern of the past few seasons has been a question of who can Spurs rely on to put the ball in the net if Harry Kane is unavailable?

KEY MAN
Mousa Dembele (above), midfielder who holds the team together.

SECRET WEAPON
Son Heung-min, South Korean who found his scoring touch last season.

YOUNG GUN
Harry Winks, midfielder dubbed "little Iniesta" by Pochettino.

4-2-3-1

APOEL

Back after two years' absence

Has sacking Been brought instability?
Only appointed in late May, Mario Been was sacked after just three games as coach. The final straw was a 1-0 loss to Romanian outfit Viitorul Contanta. Twenty-four hours later, president Prodromos Petrides fired him and brought back former club coach Giorgos Donis.

Can Donis continue a winning run?
Donis did not waste any time reviving the club's Euro prospects, turning the tables on Viitorul with a 4-0 victory in the return, then plotting a 2-0 aggregate win against Slavia Prague in the play-off round. Rumour has it that the APOEL board were not particularly keen on Donis bringing in his own backroom staff. How glad they must now be that they allowed him to do so.

Can they do it again?
After falling at the final hurdle in the past two years, APOEL are just happy to be back among the big boys. Proud of their Champions League pedigree – this will be their fourth bite of the cherry – they have vivid memories of the 2011-12 season when they beat Zenit, Porto and Lyon en route to the quarter-finals.

Creative...Georgios Efrem

● TACTICS
Donis' base formation is a compact system composed of four key elements: an intense pressing game, a pragmatic "bend-but-do-not break" approach to defending, wide-area counter-thrusts and well-rehearsed set-piece routines. Nuno Morais and Vinicius screen the back four, while Georgios Efrem and Efstathios Aloneftis supply the creative guile. The Brazil-born Belgian international Igor De Camargo is the focal point of attack, but in an emergency he could be joined up front by the powerful Benin striker Mickael Pote, who recently arrived at the club from Adana Demirspor in Turkey. Carlao, who is now back at APOEL following a stint in Italy with Torino, commands the back-line.

KEY MAN
Boy Waterman (above), underrated Dutch keeper

SECRET WEAPON
Efstathios Aloneftis, left-sided inventor with the deftest of touches on the ball.

YOUNG GUN
Minas Antoniou, former Cypriot under-21 winger.

4-2-3-1

Europa League group stage

The top two in each group will be joined in the knockout stage by the eight third-placed teams from the Champions League Group phase

Group A

SEP 14	Villarreal v Astana
SEP 14	Slavia Prague v Maccabi Tel Aviv
SEP 28	Astana v Slavia Prague
SEP 28	Maccabi Tel Aviv v Villarreal
OCT 19	Astana v Maccabi Tel Aviv
OCT 19	Villarreal v Slavia Prague
NOV 2	Maccabi Tel Aviv v Astana
NOV 2	Slavia Prague v Villarreal
NOV 23	Astana v Villarreal
NOV 23	Maccabi Tel Aviv v Slavia Prague
DEC 7	Villarreal v Maccabi Tel Aviv
DEC 7	Slavia Prague v Astana

Group B

SEP 14	Dynamo Kiev v Skenderbeu
SEP 14	Young Boys v Partizan Belgrade
SEP 28	Partizan Belgrade v Dynamo Kiev
SEP 28	Skenderbeu v Young Boys
OCT 19	Skenderbeu v Partizan Belgrade
OCT 19	Dynamo Kiev v Young Boys
NOV 2	Partizan Belgrade v Skenderbeu
NOV 2	Young Boys v Dynamo Kiev
NOV 23	Skenderbeu v Dynamo Kiev
NOV 23	Partizan Belgrade v Young Boys
DEC 7	Dynamo Kiev v Partizan Belgrade
DEC 7	Young Boys v Skenderbeu

Group C

SEP 14	Hoffenheim v Braga
SEP 14	Istanbul Basaksehir v Ludogorets
SEP 28	Ludogorets v Hoffenheim
SEP 28	Braga v Istanbul Basaksehir
OCT 19	Braga v Ludogorets
OCT 19	Hoffenheim v Istanbul Basaksehir
NOV 2	Ludogorets v Braga
NOV 2	Istanbul Basaksehir v Hoffenheim
NOV 23	Braga v Hoffenheim
NOV 23	Ludogorets v Istanbul Basaksehir
DEC 7	Hoffenheim v Ludogorets
DEC 7	Istanbul Basaksehir v Braga

Lyon...Lucas Tousart

Group D

SEP 14	Austria Vienna v Milan
SEP 14	Rijeka v AEK Athens
SEP 28	AEK Athens v Austria Vienna
SEP 28	Milan v Rijeka
OCT 19	Milan v AEK Athens
OCT 19	Austria Vienna v Rijeka
NOV 2	AEK Athens v Milan
NOV 2	Rijeka v Austria Vienna
NOV 23	Milan v Austria Vienna
NON 23	AEK Athens v Rijeka
DEC 7	Austria Vienna v AEK Athens
DEC 7	Rijeka v Milan

Villarreal... Carlos Bacca

Group E

SEP 14	Atalanta v Everton
SEP 14	Apollon Limassol v Lyon
SEP 28	Lyon v Atalanta
SEP 28	Everton v Apollon Limassol
OCT 19	Everton v Lyon
OCT 19	Atalanta v Apollon Limassol
NOV 2	Lyon v Everton
NOV 2	Apollon Limassol v Atalanta
NOV 23	Everton v Atalanta
NOV 23	Lyon v Apollon Limassol
DEC 7	Atalanta v Lyon
DEC 7	Apollon Limassol v Everton

Group F

SEP 14	Zlin v Sheriff
SEP 14	Copenhagen v Lokomotiv Moscow
SEP 28	Lokomotiv Moscow v Zlin
SEP 28	Sheriff v Copenhagen
OCT 19	Sheriff v Lokomotiv Moscow
OCT 19	Zlin v Copenhagen
NOV 2	Lokomotiv Moscow v Sheriff
NOV 2	Copenhagen v Zlin
NOV 23	Lokomotiv Moscow v Copenhagen
NOV 23	Sheriff v Zlin
DEC 7	Zlin v Lokomotiv Moscow
DEC 7	Copenhagen v Sheriff

Group G

SEP 14	Hapoel Be'er Sheva v Lugano
SEP 14	Steaua Bucharest v Viktoria Plzen
SEP 28	Viktoria Plzen v Hapoel Be'er Sheva
SEP 28	Lugano v Steaua Bucharest
OCT 19	Lugano v Viktoria Plzen
OCT 19	Hapoel Be'er Sheva v Steaua Bucharest
NOV 2	Viktoria Plzen v Lugano
NOV 2	Steaua Bucharest v Hapoel Be'er Sheva
NOV 23	Lugano v Hapoel Be'er Sheva
NOV 23	Viktoria Plzen v Steaua Bucharest
DEC 7	Hapoel Be'er Sheva v Viktoria Plzen
DEC 7	Steaua Bucharest v Lugano

Group H

SEP 14	Red Star Belgrade v BATE
SEP 14	Arsenal v Cologne
SEP 28	Cologne v Red Star Belgrade
SEP 28	BATE v Arsenal
OCT 19	BATE v Cologne
OCT 19	Red Star Belgrade v Arsenal
NOV 2	Cologne v BATE
NOV 2	Arsenal v Red Star Belgrade
NOV 23	BATE v Red Star Belgrade
NOV 23	Cologne v Arsenal
DEC 7	Red Star Belgrade v Cologne
DEC 7	Arsenal v BATE

Group I

SEP 14	Marseille v Konyaspor
SEP 14	Vitoria Guimaraes v Red Bull Salzburg
SEP 28	Red Bull Salzburg v Marseille
SEP 28	Konyaspor v Vitoria Guimaraes
OCT 19	Konyaspor v Red Bull Salzburg
OCT 19	Marseille v Vitoria Guimaraes
NOV 2	Red Bull Salzburg v Konyaspor
NOV 2	Vitoria Guimaraes v Marseille
NOV 23	Konyaspor v Marseille
NOV 23	Red Bull Salzburg v Vitoria Guimaraes
DEC 7	Marseille v Red Bull Salzburg
DEC 7	Vitoria Guimaraes v Konyaspor

Arsenal... Alexandre Lacazette

Group J

SEP 14	Zorya Luhansk v Ostersund
SEP 14	Hertha Berlin v Athletic Bilbao
SEP 28	Athletic Bilbao v Zorya Luhansk
SEP 28	Ostersund v Hertha Berlin
OCT 19	Ostersund v Athletic Bilbao
OCT 19	Zorya Luhansk v Hertha Berlin
NOV 2	Athletic Bilbao v Ostersund
NOV 2	Hertha Berlin v Zorya Luhansk
NOV 23	Ostersund v Zorya Luhansk
NOV 23	Athletic Bilbao v Hertha Berlin
DEC 7	Zorya Luhansk v Athletic Bilbao
DEC 7	Hertha Berlin v Ostersund

Group K

SEP 14	Zulte Waregem v Nice
SEP 14	Vitesse v Lazio
SEP 28	Lazio v Zulte Waregem
SEP 28	Nice v Vitesse
OCT 19	Nice v Lazio
OCT 19	Zulte Waregem v Vitesse
NOV 2	Lazio v Nice
NOV 2	Vitesse v Zulte Waregem
NOV 23	Nice v Zulte Waregem
NOV 23	Lazio v Vitesse
DEC 7	Zulte Waregem v Lazio
DEC 7	Vitesse v Nice

Group L

SEP 14	Vardar v Zenit
SEP 14	Real Sociedad v Rosenborg
SEP 28	Rosenborg v Vardar
SEP 28	Zenit v Real Sociedad
OCT 19	Zenit v Rosenborg
OCT 19	Vardar v Real Sociedad
NOV 2	Rosenborg v Zenit
NOV 2	Real Sociedad v Vardar
NOV 23	Zenit v Vardar
NOV 23	Rosenborg v Real Sociedad
DEC 7	Vardar v Rosenborg
DEC 7	Real Sociedad v Zenit

Destination Lyon

Nick Bidwell previews the teams who are in contention for this season's Europa League

THE FAVOURITES

A decade after their last European triumph, when they won the 2007 Champions League, **Milan** and their new Chinese owners will see this season's Europa League as an ideal opportunity to put down a marker, using it as a platform for a prompt return to past glories.

This summer, the *Rossoneri* have been piecing together a new team, bringing in top-class talent such as Juventus centre-back Leonardo Bonucci, Porto striker Andre Silva, Turkish playmaker Hakan Calhanoglu from Bayer Leverkusen, Swiss defender Ricardo Rodriguez from Wolfsburg, Ivorian midfielder Franck Kessie on loan from Atalanta and Villarreal stopper Mateo Musacchio. Add in a trio of teenagers – keeper Gianluigi Donnarumma, striker Patrick Cutrone and midfielder Manuel Locatelli – and you have the makings of a renaissance.

Milan see this season's Europa League as an ideal opportunity to put down a marker

Lazio, who won the UEFA Cup in 1999, will feel they have a strong hand to play. As he proved when steering the side to fourth place in Serie A last term, coach Simone Inzaghi is a shrewd tactician, and although not blessed with masses of A-grade manpower he invariably turns out teams worth more than the sum of their parts. Ciro Immobile is a natural predator who can make a cup run come alive, while in Sergej Milinkovic-Savic, Felipe Anderson and Senad Lulic they boast an abundance of creative assistants.

With the winners of the Europa League gaining a Champions League ticket, the eyes of **Arsenal** and **Everton** are bound to light up. Arsenal have won three FA Cups in four seasons and if they fail to gain sufficient momentum at the top end of the Premier League, Arsene Wenger's side will have no other choice but to put all their eggs in the Europa League basket.

Thanks to a summer spending spree, Everton should have no trouble staying competitive in both the domestic and international arenas.

Everton return... Wayne Rooney

Manager Ronald Koeman, twice a European club champion in his playing days with PSV and Barcelona, is a winner in every sense of the word and in alliance with new director of football Steve Walsh he has made a string of judicious acquisitions in promising keeper Jordan Pickford (Sunderland), central defender Michael Keane (Burnley), ex-Ajax midfielder and captain Davy Klaassen, stylish Icelandic playmaker Gylfi Sigurdsson (Swansea) and, last but by no means least, retuning prodigal son Wayne Rooney (Manchester United).

Semi-finalists last spring, **Lyon** lost several big-hitters in the close season, the list of the late and lamented including striker Alexandre Lacazette (Arsenal), midfield all-rounder Corentin Tolisso (Bayern Munich) and defence-screener Maxime Gonalons (Roma). But don't write them off just yet.

Few clubs in Europe can match OL

Renaissance...Milan's Suso (centre) celebrates with Manuel Locatelli (left) and Patrick Cutrone

for the quality of their homegrown young guns and they have bought wisely in the close season, signing Chelsea forward Bertrand Traore – who last season was a Europa League runner-up with Ajax – Brazilian centre-back Marcelo from Besiktas and former Real Madrid centre-forward Mariano. Lyon president Jean-Michel Aulas claims he has five or six stars of tomorrow in the ranks and he could be right. They also have the added incentive of hosting the 2018 Europa League Final in the Parc Olympique Lyonnais on May 16.

Villarreal, who made it to the last four of the tournament in 2011 and again in 2016 will see themselves as genuine contenders to go a step or two further.

Any side with aspirations to crack the Euro scene must, as a matter of course, have a mean defence and Villarreal are definitely a tough nut to crack, conceding only 33 goals in La Liga last term. They bid a tearful farewell this summer to rearguard leader Musacchio, but have found a solid replacement in the Portuguese Ruben Semedo, who was lured away from Sporting. Although not a free-scoring side, they do not lack penalty-box potency, where Cedric Bakumbu and the newly arrived Carlos Bacca (ex-Milan) lurk.

Ostersund have claimed the scalps of Turkish powerhouse Galatasaray and major Greek outfit PAOK so far

Mega...Saman Ghoddos announces Ostersund's arrival in the group phase

IN CONTENTION

Deprived of a Champions League shot after losing to Liverpool in the play-offs, **Hoffenheim** should find the Europa League a much more rewarding environment. Julian Nagelsmann is never short of a tactical trick or two and, always preparing his side to perfection, though they have regressed a little with the departure to Bayern Munich of Niklas Sule and Sebastian Rudy.

Since buying **Marseille** last year, American entrepreneur Frank McCourt only has one thought on his mind: to re-establish the club among the great and the good in the Champions League. He is undoubtedly putting the building blocks in place, appointing ex-Lille and Roma coach Rudi Garcia, bringing in former Barcelona administrator Andoni Zubizarreta as head of recruitment and financing an incoming transfer blitz. Among the new boys are Brazilian defensive midfielder Luiz Gustavo (previously with Bayern and Wolfsburg), Monaco second striker Valere Germain, French national team central defender Adil Rami (Valencia) and keeper Steve Mandanda, back at the Stade Velodrome after an unhappy spell at Crystal Palace.

The Basque warriors of **Athletic Bilbao** lost 3-0 to Atletico Madrid in the 2012 Final and reached the last eight in 2016. With inspirational coach Ernesto Valverde taking over at Barcelona the technical area baton has passed to Cuco Ziganda. Raul Garcia and striker Aritz Aduriz should dovetail nicely with the youthful promise of keeper Kepa Arrizabalaga, central defender Aymeric Laporte and attacker Inaki Williams.

For **Zenit**, success on the European stage is an absolute priority, and they have invested heavily this summer on striker Sebastian Driussi (River Plate), centre-back Emanuel Mammana (Lyon), and defensive midfielders Matias Kranevitter (Atletico Madrid) and Leandro Paredes (Roma). The onerous task of fielding the right blend on the pitch falls to the much-travelled Italian boss Roberto Mancini.

Nice have two factors in their favour: the meticulous organisation and strategic flair of coach Lucien Favre, and a wealth of top-level experience in the team, not least Mario Balotelli up front, veteran Brazilian stopper Dante and Dutch playmaker Wesley Sneijder, recently brought in from Galatasaray.

Warrior...Aritz Aduriz of Athletic Bilbao

Hopeful... Hoffenheim's Dennis Geiger (in white)

SOMETHING FOR THE ROMANTICS

In their first-ever European odyssey, Swedish Cup winners **Ostersund** have done remarkably well to progress this far, claiming the scalps of Turkish powerhouse Galatasaray and major Greek outfit PAOK. Coached by the Englishman Graham Potter, their key man is Swedish-born Iranian international front-man Saman Ghoddos.

Once regular Champions League participants, Norwegian champions **Rosenborg** rolled back the years in the Europa League play-off round, beating Ajax home and away. Star of the show was 21-year-old goalscoring Nigerian winger Samuel Adegbenro.

Vardar of Macedonia pulled off one of the shocks of the eliminators in seeing off Istanbul heavyweights Fenerbahce. Victorious in both legs, they managed an injury-time goal in each game.

Fourth in Croatia last season, **Osijek** knocked out Dutch side PSV in the third qualifying round. It was a bitter pill for PSV, who for the first time in 43 years had failed to gain entrance to a major European competition.

By finishing fifth in the Bundesliga, **Cologne** managed to call time on a quarter of a century without continental action. Back in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s they were European semi-finalists on five occasions and lost to Real Madrid in the 1986 UEFA Cup Final. WS

8 Europa League players to watch

Nick Bidwell highlights some of the players to keep an eye on in this season's competition

1 Daler KUZYAYEV

ZENIT

After a summer in which Zenit did not stop buying Argentinian players, it was one of the least glamorous of the new additions, and a local boy, who has adapted the quickest.

Acquired from Akhmat Grozny in a €4m deal, the 24-year-old defensive midfielder has been a revelation, impressing with his work-rate, precise distribution and shooting from distance.

A native of Saint Petersburg, he started out at Zenit's academy but was released in 2011 and rebuilt his career at Karelia Petrozavodsk and then Neftekhimik Nizhnekamsk.

Recently called up to Russia's national squad, he has just graduated from Saint Petersburg State University with a masters degree in management.

2 Jhon CORDOBA

COLOGNE

Bought for €16m from fellow Bundesliga side Mainz, the Colombian striker is the most costly signing in Cologne history. And his task now is to replace Anthony Modeste, who joined Chinese side Tianjin Quanjian, after scoring 25 goals last term.

Cordoba insists he is "totally relaxed" about the challenge of stepping into such big shoes. Tall and powerful, the 24-year-old has been playing in Europe for the past four seasons, initially in Spain with Espanyol and Granada.

A key figure in the Colombia team which won the South American under-20 title in 2013, he says he models his game on former Chelsea and Ivory Coast star Didier Drogba.

3 MARIANO

LYON

OL's new striker, brought in from Real Madrid to replace the Arsenal-bound Alexandre Lacazette, settled quickly at the Groupama Stadium, hitting three goals in his first three Ligue 1 fixtures. Lyon paid a paltry €8m for the 24-year-old and club president Jean-Michel Aulas is already patting himself on the back for concluding what he terms "an exceptional operation".

Born in Barcelona, he is a product of Real Madrid's youth scheme but made just a handful of appearances for the *Galacticos*, most of them as a substitute.

Known as "*El Toro*", he is an old-style centre-forward, full of hustle and bustle, and always looking to go for goal. Some French journalists compare his modus operandi to that of ex-Marseille goal machine Jean-Pierre Papin.

Because of his mother's lineage, he has represented the Dominican Republic.

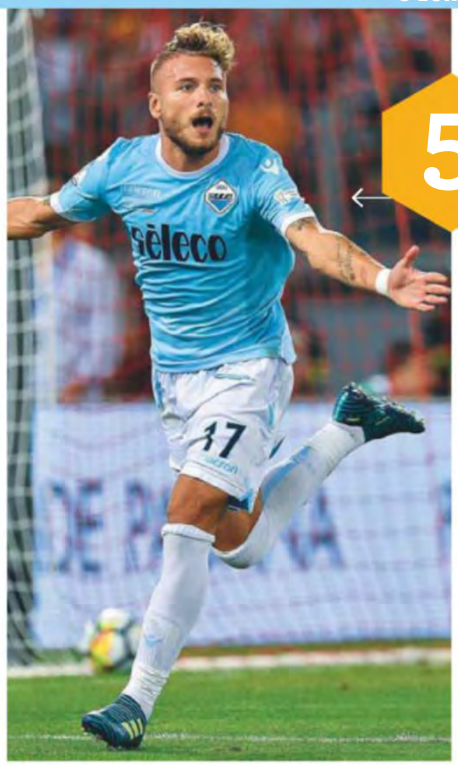
4 Pablo FORNALS

VILLARREAL

One of the hottest properties in the Spanish game, the gifted schemer won his first senior cap in a friendly against Bosnia in May and was so keen to leave Malaga for Villarreal this summer that he gladly paid his own €12m release clause.

His decision to make tracks for Villarreal had a sentimental aspect to it. He spent five seasons with the club as a boy and obviously still has a soft spot for the club. He made his debut for Malaga in 2015 at Real Madrid's Bernabeu and boasts a wonderful skill-set: two good feet, bags of imagination and flair, plenty of stamina and an eye for goal.

Poses a real threat with his powerful shooting from distance.



5 Ciro IMMOBILE

LAZIO

Following barren spells at Borussia Dortmund and Sevilla, the striker bounced back on returning to his native land, having a loan stint at old club Torino and then sparking a festival of finishing at Lazio last term, with 23 goals in 36 games.

A southerner from the Naples region, he was on Juventus' books as a teenager and even played in the Champions League for the club. After temporary postings with Siena, Grosseto and Pescara, he finally cracked the top flight at Genoa and Torino.

Serie A's top scorer in 2013-14 with 22 goals , "Toro" was in Italy's squads for both the 2014 World Cup and Euro 2016.

6 Denys GARMASH

DYNAMO KIEV

With star winger Andriy Yarmolenko having left for Borussia Dortmund, the 27-year-old Ukraine midfielder will have even more responsibility on his shoulders in Kiev.

Lining up just behind lone striker Dieumerci Mbokani, he is the link between the engine room and the front line. And when he is on song, Dynamo usually flourish.

Inventive, aware and industrious, he has appeared for the club in 32 Champions League and Europa League ties. Has won 28 senior caps for Ukraine and was in their squads for both Euro 2012 and World Cup 2016.

A graduate of the Dynamo youth ranks, he likes to drift out to the left and carve out chances from there.

7 Leonardo BONUCCI

MILAN

After seven years of blood, sweat and multiple titles with Juventus, the much-esteemed centre-back opted for a sensational change of career direction in the close season, with a €42m switch to arch-rivals Milan that caused astonishment up and down the peninsula.

Still only 30, he explained that he "no longer felt important" at Juve, but perhaps just as relevant was a feud with the club's coach, Massimiliano Allegri, which ended in him being suspended for a Champions League tie against Porto last term.

At Juventus, he was simply one defensive brick in the wall; for Milan he will be the rearguard control tower, the back-line cornerstone.

8 Adil RAMI

MARSEILLE

A veteran of 60 plus European ties with Lille, Valencia, Milan and Sevilla, the French 31-year-old will be aiming to pass on that treasure trove of experience at his new club. Some observers suggest he is on the decline, but OM coach Rudi Garcia – who had him under his wing at Lille – has other ideas, convinced that he is the rock to construct his defence on.

Known for his tenacity, comfort on the ball and being a larger-than-life character, he is in a relationship with former Baywatch star Pamela Anderson, and not a day seems to go by these days without the pair in the Gallic gossip columns. Only time will tell if it proves a distraction to his sporting life.

Born in Corsica to Moroccan parents, he lifted the 2016 Europa League with Sevilla.

Glenn Moore

Dutch make history at home

Leeuwinnen crowned European champions

Vivianne Miedema feinted left, cut right and steadied herself. Then, as nearly 30,000 orange-clad fans rose in expectation, the 20-year-old drilled a right-foot shot inside the near post to announce a new era in women's football.

As Miedema ran to celebrate with her team-mates, supporters in Twente's De Grolsch Veste stadium in Enschede went wild with delight. With two minutes remaining, Holland had an unassailable 4-2 lead over Denmark and they would become the first team other than Germany to win the Women's European Championship since 1993.

The following day, thousands turned out to welcome the Dutch team as they enjoyed a victory parade along the canals of Utrecht, culminating with a celebration in a park that was a sea of orange.

A month earlier, few in the country had heard of Miedema, Lieke Martens, Shanice Van de Sanden and the other *Leeuwinnen* (lionesses); now they were on TV, the front pages of newspapers and in shop windows.

The tournament was one of many surprises, with co-favourites Germany and France knocked out in the quarter-finals, and much-fancied Norway failing to escape the group stage. Dark horses Spain and 2016 Olympic silver medallists Sweden also disappointed, while World Cup bronze medallists England fell in the semi-finals once again.

The succession of eyebrow-raising results highlighted the maturing of the women's game, with investment by FAs across Europe raising standards of preparation and performance. That was underlined by just one of the 31 matches being won by a margin in excess of three goals – England's 6-0 drubbing of injury-hit Scotland – and more than half being drawn or decided by a single goal. Goalkeeping standards remain unsatisfactory, and improved defensive organisation is yet to be countered by better attacking creativity, but in terms of fitness, technique and tactical awareness huge strides have been made.

Winner...Vivianne Miedema (left)

The improved football and competitive nature of the tournament led to record crowds, record television viewing figures and frenzied social media participation.

The Final was watched by an 85 per cent small-screen market share in the host nation. The Holland-England semi-final drew a peak of four million viewers in England – not far short of the 4.4m average when Champions League group-stage games were last shown on terrestrial British TV. For the other semi-final, in which Denmark beat Austria on penalties, 12,000 watched in Vienna on giant screens while Danish TV attracted a two-thirds market share. Perhaps most surprisingly, more German TV viewers chose to watch the quarter-final defeat to Denmark than Sebastian Vettel's Grand Prix win in Hungary.

Golden Boot...Jodie Taylor of England

However, not everyone was a fan. Arnold Muhren, a men's European Championship winner with Holland in 1988, derided his compatriots stating they would lose to a men's amateur team as men were faster and stronger. While Holland coach Sarina Wiegman largely ignored Muhren, her Danish equivalent Nils Nielsen began his pre-Final press conference with the response: "Give women's football the damn respect it deserves." He then added: "If you don't like it, please be quiet, don't be disrespectful, let the girls play."

The following day "the girls" made their own pitch for respect. The Final, especially the opening 45 minutes, was a superb demonstration of the women's game, featuring outstanding attacking play and a half which flowed from end to end, all in a vibrant atmosphere.

Nadia Nadim, an Afghan refugee who was smuggled to Denmark as a child

WOMEN'S EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIPS FINAL

Aug 6, Enschede (De Grolsch Veste)
Holland 4 (Miedema 10, 89, Martens 28, Harder 32)
Denmark 2 (Nadim 6 pen, Spitse 50)
HT: 3-1. **Att:** 28,182. **Ref:** Staubli (Swi)
Holland: Van Veenendaal (Arsenal) – Van Lunteren (Ajax), Dekker (Montpellier), Van der Gragt (Ajax), Van Es (Twente) – Groenen (Frankfurt), Van de Donk (Arsenal), Spitse (Twente) – Van de Sanden (Liverpool), Miedema (Arsenal), Martens (Barcelona). Coach: Wiegman.
Subs: Janssen (Arsenal) for Lunteren, 58; Jansen (Twente) for Van de Sanden, 89; Van den Berg (Reading) for Van Es, 90.
Yellow cards: Groenen 21, Dekker 43, Van der Gragt 72
Denmark: Petersen (Kolding) – Nielsen (Valerenga), Boye Sorensen (Rosengard), Larsen (Brondby), Sandvej (Frankfurt) – Troelgaard (Rosengard), Kildemoes (Lindkopings), Junge Pedersen (Rosengard), Veje (Montpellier) – Harder (Wolfsburg), Nadim (Portland Thorns). Coach: Nielsen.
Sub: Thorgorsen (Fortuna Hjorring) for Kildemoes; 60; Roddik Hansen (Barcelona) for Boye Sorensen, 77; Christiansen (Rosengard) for Junge Pederesen, 82.
Yellow card: Nadim

Player of the Final: Sherida Spitse (Holland)
Player of the tournament: Lieke Martens (Holland)
Golden Boot: Jodie Taylor (England) five goals

Success...Holland's women lift their first major trophy

Excitement...Dutch fans

after the Taliban executed her father, began the scoring with a fifth-minute penalty. Miedema quickly levelled and Martens then put the hosts ahead before Pernille Harder made it 2-2. There was barely half an hour gone.

Inevitably, the pace slowed, and after Sherida Spitse's free-kick gave the Dutch an early second-half advantage they largely controlled the match. Yet it was still in the balance until Miedema's second goal sparked the celebrations.

Even before the denouement Muhren's view seemed an isolated one in his home country. The Dutch took their cue from King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima, who attended the opening game, and gradually fell in love with a group of players whose infectious enthusiasm was the perfect pick-up for a nation that had wearied of their male footballers' stumbling form.

Arsenal-bound Miedema, new Barcelona signing Martens, and Liverpool's Van de Sanden made up a scintillating attacking trident as Wiegman opted for the tried-and-tested Dutch 4-3-3. In midfield, Arsenal's Danielle Van de Donk, Frankfurt's Jackie Groenen and Spitse of Twente swamped opponents with their energy and befuddled them with their passing. A solid defence and goalkeeper, beaten only once before the Final, provided the platform.

The Dutch had launched the tournament in style, with a then-national record 21,732 watching their opening game and they would go on to win a tight Group A ahead of Denmark, Belgium and a pedestrian Norway.

Group B began with the surprise defeat of Italy by Russia but ended as anticipated, with Germany and Sweden qualifying. Neither, however, convinced, with Germany scoring only once apart from penalties and Sweden losing to Italy.

Debutants Austria were the shock winners of Group C, beating Switzerland and Iceland either side of holding an uninspired France. The latter only just qualified, snatching a late point with 10 women against the Swiss.

England romped through Group D with three wins and a 10-1 goal difference. Jodie Taylor scored four in two games, including a hat-trick against Scotland. The Scots recovered well from that rout but fell a goal short of edging out Spain.

England's unwanted reward was a quarter-final against France, who they had not beaten in four decades. However, Taylor struck again to win a tight match. Even more surprising was Denmark's 2-1 win over Germany, while the effervescent Dutch eased past Sweden and Austria beat Spain on penalties.

Austria proved less successful from the spot in the semi-final, losing to Denmark, who were early adopters of the women's game and won unofficial titles in the 1970s, but had claimed none since UEFA became involved.

The other semi was comfortable for the Dutch who brushed aside England 3-0. Denmark put up more resistance in the Final but Holland, who won all five matches, were worthy champions. WS

Euro 2017 **Post-script**

TRANSFER TRAIL PICKS UP

Several transfers followed in the wake of the finals. Swedish duo Caroline Seger and Kosovare Asllani returned home, to Rosengard from Lyon and Linkopings from Manchester City respectively.

Denmark finalist Sofie Junge Pedersen left Rosengard for Levante. England veteran Fara Williams swapped Arsenal for Reading, with Sweden's Jessica Samulesson joining the Gunners from Linkopings. Earlier, Spain's Jenni Hermoso moved from Barcelona to Paris Saint-Germain, while French midfielder Elise Bussaglia joined the Catalan club from German side Wolfsburg. Lucy Bronze became the first English player at Lyon, leaving Manchester City, Germany's Pauline Bremer going the other way.

In addition Boston Breakers' Amanda Da Costa, who played for Portugal at Euro 2017, announced her retirement at 27.

ALUKO ROW SPOILS FA MOOD

The positive attention England's semi-final run garnered prompted the Football Association to announce it would bid to host the 2021 Euros. However, the good mood dissipated when it emerged that the FA paid Chelsea striker Eniola Akuko £80,000 after she made allegations of racism and bullying by England manager Mark Sampson.

The FA said an independent enquiry "found no wrongdoing" but they "agreed a mutual resolution to avoid disruption to the squad's [Euro 2017] preparations". Aluko, who said the cash was a settlement in lieu of an employment tribunal, won the last of her 102 England caps in April 2016, despite being WSL top scorer that summer.

Accused... Sampson

Row...Aluko

List... Martens

MARTENS HEADS SHORTLIST

Lieke Martens was voted UEFA's 2016-17 Women's Player of the Year ahead of Pernille Harder of Denmark and Lyon's Champions League winner Dzenifer Marozan.

Martens, who succeeds Ada Hegerberg, was one of four Dutch Euro 2017 winners in the top 10.

ROAD TO RUSSIA

LUCESCU IN AFTER OUSTING OF TERIM

Turkish football journalists will have far less hot copy now that iconic national coach Fatih "The Emperor" Terim has departed the scene and been replaced by the veteran Romanian, Mircea Lucescu.

In charge of Turkey for 11 years across three spells, Terim found himself persona non grata after he and his bodyguards were caught trashing a fast-food restaurant in the west-coast resort of Alacati in a no-holds-barred fracas that left five people injured.

Terim's son-in-law Ahmet Baran Cetin, who runs a nearby steakhouse, had reportedly been at odds over a partition wall with kebab shop owner Selahattin Aydogdu, who is the former president of the Adana Demirspor club and once sat on the Turkish FA board.

"For a while, a number of non-football issues have been weighing down Terim and our administration," read a Turkish federation (TFF) statement. "The two parties came to the conclusion that it would be healthier to part company."

Fiery...Fatih Terim

Terim, as fiery and forthright as ever, later denied that he had resigned by mutual agreement, claiming on his official Twitter account that he had been sacked.

Aged 63, Terim had been on shaky ground for some time. Turkey's first-round exit at Euro 2016 was a serious blow to his credibility, while clashes with a number of high-profile players – such as skipper and creator-in-chief Arda Turan, midfielder Selcuk Inan and striker Burak Yilmaz – left him extremely vulnerable. His reputation was further sullied by an unseemly public spat with ex-international goalkeeper Rustu Recber.

As Turkey's most successful coach of

Replacement...Mircea Lucescu

Back...Arda Turan (left) in action against Macedonia

all time, notably winning the UEFA Cup in 2000 with Galatasaray and steering the national team to the last four of Euro 2008, Terim's power base extended far beyond the sports field.

But, ultimately, he made the mistake of thinking he was omnipotent. He crossed the line in the kebab-shop brawl and even his many allies in the media could not save him.

With Terim gone, the TFF's initial plan was to go back to the future, targeting former national bosses Senol Gunes, who, is currently in charge of champions Besiktas, and Abdullah Avci of Istanbul Basaksehir.

However, neither was interested, and so the decision was made to court Lucescu, who had been out of work since being sacked by Zenit in May. The 72-year-old Romanian required little persuasion to pick up the baton, signing a two-year deal with the option of an additional 12 months.

Lucescu is no stranger to the Turkish game. Early in the new millennium he spent four seasons with Galatasaray and Besiktas and won the Super Lig with both. He also has coached clubs in his homeland (Dinamo and Rapid Bucharest), Italy (Pisa, Brescia, Reggiana and Internazionale) and Ukraine, where over a 12-year period, he made Shakhtar Donetsk domestic top dogs and a genuine European force.

He has been around the international block too, leading Romania between 1981 and 1986 and taking them to the European Championship finals in France in 1984.

"I'd twice had approaches from the TFF. Finally it's happened," declared Lucescu on his unveiling. "Perhaps I should have done it earlier. I enjoyed some really good times with Galatasaray and Besiktas."

The new man in charge of the Crescent Stars will have no room for error. If the Turks are to make Russia 2018, they must at least finish second in their qualifying group and will need to pull out all the stops to overhaul the likes of Croatia and Iceland.

Lucescu's first act of his latest assignment was to convince Arda Turan to go back on his recent decision to retire from international football. The 30-year-old midfielder quit the national team in June following a bust-up with a journalist on the flight back from a friendly in Macedonia, and with Arda supposedly convinced that the powers-that-be had hung him out to dry, reconciliation looked impossible.

> "I'd twice had approaches from the TFF. Finally it's happened. Perhaps I should have done it earlier"
> New Turkey boss Mircea Lucescu

All credit then to Lucescu for his peace-brokering efforts. "When the coach believes it appropriate, I'd be honoured to have the national jersey on my back," said Arda, who can now look forward to completing a century of full caps sometime soon. "I want to be with my friends in the Turkey side."

Nick Bidwell

WORLD CUP 2018: DATES

Oct 2, 2017
Penultimate round of qualifying group games in Africa

Oct 5-7, 2017
Asian fifth-place play-off 1st leg; penultimate round of qualifying group games in Europe, South America and CONCACAF

Oct 8-10, 2017
Asian fifth-place play-off 2nd leg; last round of qualifying group games in Europe, South America and CONCACAF

Nov 6, 2017
Last round of qualifying group games in Africa; CONCACAF v AFC play-off 1st leg; South America v Oceania play-off 1st leg

Nov 9-11, 2017
European play-offs 1st leg

Nov 12-14, 2017
European play-offs 2nd leg; CONCACAF v AFC play-off 2nd leg; South America v Oceania play-off 2nd leg

Dec 1, 2017
Draw for the finals

Jun 14, 2018
Opening game of the finals

Jul 15, 2018
World Cup Final

Finale...Wales (in red) host Republic of Ireland on October 9

Facetoface

STUART BAXTER

"We need a South African way of playing that can win games and shock the world"

English coach Stuart Baxter kicked off his second spell in charge of South Africa with an impressive 2-0 win in Nigeria and now has his sights set on reaching a major finals

How much would going to Russia make up for the disappointment of the 2006 campaign, when qualification was lost right at the end of what looked to be a comfortable campaign?
The motivation for me is that, maybe, 2006 I thought [South African football] would be receptive to some of the things I wanted to do, but we weren't. Maybe I was naive but I certainly think there has been a slight wind of change in the game here. I think the league has developed and the association have been saying to me they want to do certain things now, so I'm hoping we will get those things that I wanted to do the first time, finished. Hopefully that will lead to the country taking part in a major championship.

How important was it to get off to a positive start in the 2018 African Nations Cup qualifiers, against Nigeria?
I think the result in itself was maybe a shock for a lot of people, but for me it was vital to get off to a good start. We maybe didn't need to go there and beat them 2-0, but we certainly needed to go there, play well and kindle some optimism. Beating Nigeria, given the history between the two countries, definitely comes under the heading "Good Start", I would think. It gives the players confidence – I would think that good things are on the horizon – and it gives me the confidence that we can actually compete with the best. It puts the wind up our back rather than in our faces, and it's not just good for me but it's good for everybody.

Were you taken aback at the potential of the South African side?
What I was surprised at was that Nigeria had been in camp in France, played a couple of friendly games, smashed Togo 3-0 and drew with a French regional side. We'd been in camp for just three or four days, had a horrendously long, arduous trip to Nigeria, and yet the lads were fresh and sharp and bright and took on board very quickly what we wanted to do in the game. That I was surprised with. Pleasantly surprised, I must say!

Do you feel that South Africa, with its infrastructure and economic might, is still a massive underachiever in football, especially in African competition?
Yes, I think that's correct. The game has been held back by divisiveness. Those in the South African game have never really got on the same page. I've worked at clubs in the league and I've also worked for SAFA and I know what the attitude is towards the league and what the clubs think of the FA. When can we unite everybody – look, there are always going to be differing opinions in the game and that is part of it – behind a strategy of "how do we present South Africa to the world"? If we go to the World Cup we have got to take something South African there. Not a version of what some people think is good football and some people think is not, but have a South African way of playing that can also win games and shock the world. If we go to Russia there is no point in going there and losing every game because we're just naive. We need to be going there and people say "wow, that's not Brazil, not Argentina, England, Germany, that's South Africa!" There needs to be pride, and I feel at the moment the shoots of a young tree are just coming through. For a long time it has been divisive, defensive and not conducive to real development. I think we can get on the same page-ish. We can become a powerhouse.

With your experience of coaching across the world – Japan, England, Scandinavia and previous spells in Africa – what is the potential of the South African footballer, who is seen to be technically gifted but with many deficiencies? Are you working with uncut gems?
To a degree, yes. As far as game management and understanding what wins games, they are a little naive. In many cases the South African footballer is very mobile, technically good. Their decision-making is not always the best but that is based on "what are we trying to do?" or "how do we win this game?" In some ways the past history has produced this kind of footballer – and if I look back to the 1996 African Nations Cup and players like Mark Fish, Phil Masinga and Neil Tovey, you don't see any of those kind of players around any more. We have drifted towards a very technical approach, an entertaining approach. But I think we drifted away from what won us the AFCON at that time and we drifted to a more crowd-pleasing mode that we have only just started to come out of because we don't like the fact that other countries have gone away from us [in terms of achievement]. So I feel again that that wind of change is there and there is more admiration for other qualities. But I'm not saying we should throw the baby out with the bath water because the previous approach has developed some very skilful and gifted players. We need to mould that into a fighting unit and they need to have their role alongside a more physically dominant player so that we don't go to Ghana, Nigeria or wherever, entertain everyone and then lose 3-0 on three set plays because basically the opponent is physically that much stronger than we are. Moulding that fighting unit is the challenge that we all have in the South African game.

Are you confident you'll be among the 32 at the World Cup finals in Russia next year?
I don't think anybody can be confident in football, but you can be confident in your preparation and confident in your players. I know the whole nation is desperate to reach a major championship, so if it is down to hard work, good preparation and dedication then I think we have a very good chance. I'm confident we'll stretch this group right down to the wire and remain competitive, and there is a good chance people in South Africa will experience a major tournament again.

Interview by Mark Gleeson

World Soccer vintage 36 years ago

September 1981

Mario Kempes: the fallen idol of Argentina's World Cup triumph

Morocco, who were getting ready to play a final-round qualifier against Cameroon in November for one of the two African places at the 1982 World Cup, were on the cover of our September 1981 issue. Inside, Eric Weil caught up with Mario Kempes – who had won the tournament in 1978 – to find out why things had gone so wrong for the Argentinian striker over the previous three years.

"They are happy memories," said Kempes of the World Cup triumph. "Memories which are already part of history, but on which one can't live forever.

"[After the World Cup] I returned to Valencia but there's something that needs explaining first.

"We were concentrating on the national team for over two months. In all that time nothing else existed for us other than soccer and our objective of becoming world champions. We had to forget everything else that made up normal life and this needed enormous mental power.

"Then came the celebrations, the parties, interviews at all times of the day. I needed a long quiet holiday, but I didn't have it.

"As soon as I got back to Spain, pre-season started with Valencia and that was my undoing. Things did not come off as I wanted to in matches, so I trained harder during the week and that made it worse."

Struggle...Kempes had injury woes after the 1978 World Cup

FOUR WORLD SOCCER, SEPTEMBER, 1981

WHATEVER HAPPENE

Argentina's forgotten World C

from Eric Weil

MARIO KEMPES, Argentina's leading scorer in the 1978 World Cup finals, has never been out of the news since River Plate brought him back to Argentina in March . . . although he has hardly played since then.

River Plate, it was said, bought the player to counteract Diego Maradona's going to their leading rivals, Boca Juniors. It was not so much a matter of cash . . . neither of the two big clubs had any . . . but at River Plate six World Cup players would not have been satisfied to earn less than Maradona and the club would not have been able to afford such a wage bill.

So River Plate got Kempes amid a lot of fanfare for 3.5 million dollars to be paid 500,000 dollars down and the rest in 12 monthly instalments of 250,000 dollars. River Plate have not paid anything further to Spain's Valencia apart from the initial 500,000 dollars at press time and after lengthy negotiations managed to refinance the debt to be paid off in 35 months- . . . which lent more strength to the belief that Valencia were glad to get rid of the player. River Plate had hoped that their fans would rush to buy long term season tickets to help finance the deal, but the sales propaganda cost the club more than the actual proceeds.

Kempes scored a couple of goals on his debut, played for parts of a few more matches, but was frequently out injured. And that set off the real controversy. What was the extent of his injury? . . . Would he ever play again? . . . Had River Plate "been had" although it was said that a club doctor passed him fit before the transfer went through?

Doctors disagreed on Kempes' state of health. National team doctor Ruben Oliva said he had been fully reported on the player's chronic injury when he came to play for Argentina in the Gold Cup tournament in Montevideo at the beginning of the year and that River Plate were not interested in his report. All sorts of serious injuries and illnesses were invented for Kempes by different publications. Finally a medical team, commissioned by the River Plate club, gave their official report in very technical terms, not specifying clearly the nature of Kempes' problem, but rather taking pains to dismiss all rumours. It added that Kempes could be cured, but that it would be a lengthy process.

The player himself had been strangely silent through all this and when asked, usually replied that he was all mixed up. But what has happened to the player who suddenly became a star the world over after becoming top scorer and being named best player at the 1978 World Cup finals?

"They are happy memories," says Kempes, "memories which are already part of history, but on which one can't live forever. I am left with the enormous satisfaction of having served my country at the thing I know how to do best."

And then what happened?

"I returned to Valencia, but there's something that needs explaining first. We were concentrating on the national team for over two months. In all that time nothing else existed for us than soccer and our objective of becoming world champions. During that time we had to forget everything else that made up the normal life of a guy and this needed enormous mental power. When it was all over, it was followed by a type of relax, clearing our minds of soccer as if all at once we forgot everything.

You might call it saturation!

"Yes, but not physical or soccer saturation, but all in the mind. And it didn't all finish with the final. Then came the celebrations, the parties, interviews at all times of the day. I think after all that I would have needed a long quiet holiday, but I didn't have it. As soon as I got back to Spain, pre-season matches started with Valencia and that was my undoing. Things did not come off as I wanted to in matches, so I trained harder during the week and that made it worse. I was dead tired when Sunday came. I didn't score goals and I didn't play well. The fans and press complained, said I wasn't trying, I had become a big head and all sorts of things and that didn't help me either."

Was it lack of motivation after winning the World Cup?

"No, certainly not. I wanted to become champion with Valencia too and that became an obsession."

Some people said that the main reason for your poor performances was that you did not have time to recuperate from the excessive quantities of stimulants used during the World Cup!

"Look, the only thing that messed us up was that long concentration without an adequate holiday afterwards and I can assure you that none of the boys used stimulants for the simple reason that there was a strict anti-doping control and if anybody had been caught it would have cut short their soccer career."

They also said in Spain that you were too fond of going out at night and while you couldn't do it while preparing for the World Cup, you never lost an opportunity to make up for it now!

"They said so many lies and invented so many things. I had my best games for Valencia before the World Cup and at that time I was single and I went out a lot at night . . . but nobody said anything. After the World Cup I married and looked after myself much more, but when things don't come off on the field, they always invent stories. I realise journalists have to write stories and I never refused them an interview, but they priced into my private life and that can't be. In Spain I sometimes went out with my wife on a Monday evening and we returned home about 1 am, but next day a newspaper would come out with a story that I had been out with another woman and came home drunk at seven in the morning."

But let's get back to soccer. So that 78-79 season was a bad one for you?

"Yes, I'd rather forget it. In the following

Kempes (9) beats Rodriguez from a rebound for River Plate's goal in the 1-1 draw against Boca Juniors in Argentina's first division soccer classic.

The next couple of seasons at Valencia proved something of a struggle for an injury-plagued Kempes. But that did not stop River Plate bringing him back to his homeland in a bid to negate bitter rivals Boca Juniors' purchase of a youngster by the name of Diego Maradona.

However, after scoring a couple of goals on his debut, things didn't really work out for Kempes at River and he only managed to play a few more games before getting injured once again.

"They bought me to appease their fans because Maradona had slipped through their hands and gone to their great rivals, Boca Juniors," agreed Kempes. "They brought me back in time to start playing in the Libertadores Cup so I had to start playing right away – fit or not."

Weil asked Kempes about having to play in a different position at River – he was asked to become more of a playmaker; dropping back to find the ball and playing out from his own penalty area – and Kempes explained: "With River Plate I had to cover more ground, and even found myself playing in defence at times as it's the style of the team, but I haven't changed my playing style and I don't think I will.

"The real Kempes is the one of the 1978 World Cup who was always near to scoring.

"The important thing now is to get over my injuries and to start having a bit more luck in front of goal.

"I think that when River Plate get over their bad spell I will also get back to my former self." WS

> **"Nothing else existed for us other than soccer and our objective of becoming world champions"**
> Mario Kempes

WORLD SOCCER, SEPTEMBER, 1981 — FIVE

D TO MARIO KEMPES?

up hero talks to World Soccer

Mario Kempes

season, after my first rest in over two years, my play improved, but I just couldn't get any goals in . . . which is very worrying for a scorer of whom the fans expect goals. Last season, however, I started off well, but in the fourth match, a European Cupwinners tie against Monaco, I pulled a muscle. I don't know why as I wasn't really straining myself at the time, but perhaps DiStefano was right about what he said in an interview later, that a player cannot take a 40-day holiday which is too long to be completely away from soccer. I took all that time to go away with my family, but when I returned I was three kilos overweight and had a job to get rid of them . . . but I hadn't had a proper holiday in four years. That was the start of my series of injuries.

"Fifteen days later I was back in the team in another Cupwinners tie against East Germany's Carl Zeiss Jena and fell badly, hurting my shoulder. In the return leg I again fell on the same shoulder and had to stop playing again. All these injuries stopped me from getting back to form and although I played all the same, I could never play my best. The harder I trained, the worse I played, so I was agreeably surprised when Menotti called me to include me in the Argentine team for the Gold Cup tournament in Montevideo, but there I again injured my leg during the first match and did not play in the second. I am still trying to recover from that injury today."

So you returned to Spain injured, or would you rather have stayed in Argentina?

"Honestly I was still keen to win a league title with Valencia, but I just couldn't play as I used to and the criticisms started again. I felt so bad about the whole thing that it even affected my marriage. I told the club that I just couldn't go on that way and at that moment River Plate's offer came from Argentina and I didn't think twice about it. It's true I left Valencia as a failure, but a failure during the last two seasons only, because before that I think I did a lot for them."

But you were coming to River Plate with a great responsibility on your shoulders?

"Yes, you're right. They bought me to appease their fans because Maradona had slipped through their hands and gone to their great rivals, Boca Juniors and they had brought me back just in time to start playing in the Libertadores Cup — a trophy they have never been able to win in nine attempts and which has become something of an obsession with them. So I had to start playing right away, fit or not. What I am most sorry about all this is that the cup escaped us once again and that I haven't yet been able to pay the club back for all the confidence they have put in me and the money they are paying for me which they are finding so hard to get."

At River Plate the talk is of forming a new team with new stars and one of them is called Kempes. Does that responsibility weigh you down?

"There's a lot of talk here of players having completed their cycle, specially of three midfield stalwarts such as Alonso, J. Lopez and Merlo who have helped the club to many titles, but who at around 30 can not yet have 'completed their usefulness' and it can't be their fault only because we all played badly. But if I was given the responsibility of being the midfield axis of a new team, it wouldn't get me down. I had that responsibility in a World Cup team, didn't I?"

Alfredo Di Stefano may be River Plate's next coach. What do you think of that?

"If Di Stefano comes, I'll meet up with a coach who knows me well, so we should be able to understand each other even if we had our little differences at Valencia."

But it was said in Spain that at Valencia you said that either you or he had to leave the club?

"That was another lie. At the time they invented that one I was on my honeymoon in Brazil. The trouble is he made me play No. 9, the position I like least, but he did it as a necessity, because he knew I needed to spurt from behind."

Now that you're back in the country, you'll have a better chance to get into the World Cup team again?

"Of course. That's another reason I'm glad to be back, because although Menotti always said I was in his plans, he also said that the players in the country will have the first chance over those with clubs abroad."

Do you think Argentina can repeat their 1978 World Cup triumph?

"Of course they can. There's a whole lot of experience to back us now, but there will be some tough rivals like West Germany and Brazil who are getting back to top form at the right moment."

Menotti tried to see if you and Maradona could play well together during the Gold Cup tournament, but he didn't have a chance because of your injury. Do you think you could team up well with him?

"I think so. It would be a question of adapting to what is required. I see that at Boca Juniors, Brindisi plays "9" and works well with Maradona because he adapted his own play. I don't feel so comfortable at "9", as I mentioned before, but if that's what is needed, I'll do it without any problem."

Do you think that with the entry of Maradona and Diaz and the absence of Luque, Argentina will be able to retain the same attacking style as in the 1978 World Cup, or will it change?

"I think in general the same style will be maintained, because you can not change a lot, taking into account that the basis of the team will be about the same. Of course we can try out new variations, but Maradona and Diaz showed excellent understanding with the same style in the 1979 Junior World Cup finals and that should work again."

You must be specially keen to go back to Spain with the Argentine World Cup team as it would be a kind of revenge?

"No, not at all. I want to be there for the honour of defending my country, but in Spain I don't think I have to show anybody anything and I have no thoughts of revenge."

The image people have of Kempes is that of a goal scorer. In the few matches you have played for River Plate, you were more of a play maker, dropping back a lot and playing far from the penalty area. Is Kempes changing?

"They always say that as players become older, they tend to go less into the area, but I don't think that has happened with me. With River Plate I had to cover more ground and even found myself playing in defence at times as it's the style of the team, but I haven't changed my playing style and I don't think I will. The real Kempes is the one of the 1978 World Cup who was always near to scoring."

And the Kempes of today is very far from that real one?

"Yes, very far . . . but I think the important thing now is to get over my injuries and to start having a bit more luck in front of goal. I think that when River Plate get over their bad spell, as surely they will, I will also get back to my former self."

So today Kempes is once again a player with the promise of better things in the future, but with plenty of experience behind him and the words of French World Cup coach, Michel Hidalgo, come to mind: "Kempes is a strong player with a hard shot and the calmness to score. But I believe that in the last World Cup finals, in spite of all the praise he got, he did not play as well as he can."

Also in this issue...

p7
Eric Batty was critical of some of the 1966 England team who played under Ron Greenwood. "To the public these players were heroes," he wrote. "But I know they let him down by drinking and having a good time, staying out late before big games that West Ham should have won but lost. I saw the way they half-trained and half-played. These players never let England down in the way they let West Ham and Ron Greenwood down."

The managers
This month — RON GREENWOOD

p15
Chile had qualified for the World Cup with what Eric Weil described as possibly "the best team they have ever had". Their coach, Luis Santibanez, was good friends with Argentina's Cesar Menotti and, remarked Weil, "similarities exist in the tactical systems and technique they use as well as in their psychological approach and organisation."

CHILE'S BEST CUP CAMPAIGN – SO FAR!

p16-17
Brian Glanville claimed that hooliganism was not the fault of football, writing: "If rugby were the national sport, and roused the passions among the populace that soccer does, then hooliganism would doubtless be its problem too."

Changes at Lancaster Gate will be for the better . .
BRIAN GLANVILLE
DO YOU THINK TO BAN US MR CROKER

p19
Eric Batty took a bold stance and put forward the argument that Alfredo Di Stefano deserved to be recognised as a better player than Pele. He made the declaration that: "For me, Di Stefano was twice as good as Pele, if you can believe it, for he had just as much skill as the Brazilian and a whole lot more. And it was not Real Madrid who won the European Cup five times in a row but Alfredo Di Stefano."

BETTER THAN PELE!
ALL THE GREATS
Alfredo Di Stefano

10 years ago
Four years after they won the tournament for the first time, Germany become the first nation to successfully retain the Women's World Cup, beating first-time finalists Brazil 2-0 in front of 31,000 people in China.

20 years ago
Signed from Crystal Palace six years earlier, Ian Wright scores a hat-trick for Arsenal against Bolton Wanderers at Highbury to break Cliff Bastin's scoring record of 178 goals. Wright's total haul of 185 for the Gunners was eventually surpassed by Thierry Henry.

30 years ago
Ceri Williams scores a late winner as Merthyr Tydfil beat Serie A side Atalanta 2-1 in the first round, first leg of the European Cup-winners Cup. However, two first-half goals in the return game ended the Welsh club's progress.

40 years ago
Miljan Miljanic, who led Real Madrid to successive Liga titles in 1975 and 1976, resigns as coach after a 2-1 loss to Salamanca on the opening day of the new season, with Luis Molowny replacing him.

50 years ago
Celtic's defence of their European Cup title ends in the first round as they lose 2-1 at home and can only salvage a 1-1 draw away as they crash out 3-2 on aggregate to Dynamo Kiev. Bobby Lennox scores in both legs for the Scottish side.

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European fall...Red Bull Salzburg (in green)

AUGUST 4-30, 2017

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world

Friday August 4

SIERRA LEONE: John Keister, who took charge of just one game as national coach, is suspended indefinitely by the Sierra Leone FA after allegedly calling its president Isha Johansen "corrupt".

Saturday August 5

GERMANY: Bayern Munich twice come from behind to draw 2-2 with Borussia Dortmund before winning the Super Cup on penalties.

Sunday August 6

ARAB CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP: Egyptian ref Ibrahim Nour El Din is head-butted during the Arab Club Championship Final and attacked by players, officials and fans of Jordan's Al Faisaly as they lose 3-2 to Tunisia's Esperance in extra-time.
ENGLAND: The Community Shield is the first game in England to use the ABBA penalty sequence system, with Arsenal beating Chelsea.
TURKEY: Konyaspor's 2-1 victory over Besiktas in the Super Cup is marred by a pitch invasion after the final whistle and fighting between rival fans.
USA: David Villa scores a hat-trick as New York City beat New York Red Bulls 3-2.

Tuesday August 8

SPAIN: Real Madrid retain the UEFA Super Cup with a 2-1 victory over Manchester United.

Wednesday August 9

BRAZIL: Flamengo's Vinicius Junior, who will join Real Madrid for €45m in 2019, scores his first professional goal, in a 5-0 win over Palestino in the Sudamericana cup.
CYPRUS: Ten-man Apollon score two late goals to beat APOEL 2-1 and claim their second successive Super Cup.
ITALY: National coach Giampiero Ventura signs a new two-year contract to lead the *Azzurri* to the 2020 European Championship.
MEXICO: Rafael Marquez is one of 22 people and 42 organisations sanctioned by the US treasury department for having ties with alleged drug trafficker Raul Flores Hernandez. Mexico's captain is accused of being a "front person" for a drugs cartel.
PORTUGAL: Benfica begin their defence of the league title with a 3-1 win at home to Braga.
SCOTLAND: Dundee United chairman Stephen Thompson is assaulted and pushed to the ground after a 2-1 defeat by city rivals Dundee in the Scottish League Cup.
SPAIN: Barcelona have a bid of €100m for Philippe Coutinho rejected by Liverpool.

Thursday August 10

GERMANY: Ousmane Dembele is suspended by Borussia Dortmund after missing training, with the club having turned down an offer from Barcelona for the France international earlier in the day.
SENEGAL: US Ouakam are banned for seven years following the crowd trouble in July's League Cup Final against Stade de Mbour which left eight people dead, although club president Abdoul Aziz Gueye insists: "We are going to appeal this penalty, which seems to us to be heavy and disproportionate."

Sub...Lille striker Nicolas De Preville is beaten while in goal against Strasbourg

Friday August 11

ENGLAND: Hours after Liverpool say that Philippe Coutinho is not for sale, the Brazilian midfielder submits a transfer request.
MOROCCO: The Royal Moroccan Football Federation tells FIFA it will bid to host the 2026 World Cup.

Saturday August 12

ENGLAND: Trailing 3-0 at half-time, Chelsea begin their defence of the Premier League with two red cards and a 3-2 loss at home to Burnley. Wayne Rooney scores on his second Everton league debut, 13 years after he left the club, as they beat Stoke City 1-0.
HOLLAND: Ajax suffer an opening-day defeat in the Eredivisie, losing 2-1 at Heracles.
SPAIN: Real Madrid boss Zinedine Zidane agrees a new three-year deal with the European champions.

Sunday August 13

FRANCE: Neymar scores on his Paris Saint-Germain debut as they win 3-0 at Guingamp. Lille try two different outfield players in goal

Dominant...Real Madrid (in black) get the better of Manchester United in the UEFA Super Cup, which was played in Macedonia

after keeper Mike Maignan is sent off in a 3-0 defeat at Strasbourg. Monaco win 4-1 at Dijon but leave Kylian Mbappe on the bench, with reports claiming that the 18-year-old has agreed to join PSG.

GERMANY: Hamburg lose 3-1 at third-tier Osnabruck, who have a man sent off, in the German Cup.

ITALY: Juventus score twice in the last five minutes before Lazio grab an even later goal to win the Italian Super Cup 3-2. Bologna lose 3-0 at home to Serie B side Cittadella in the Italian Cup.

PERU: Alianza Lima are crowned Apertura champions with a 0-0 draw at Comerciantes Unidos.

SPAIN: Sub Cristiano Ronaldo comes off the bench to score but is later sent off as Real Madrid beat Barcelona 3-1 in the first leg of the Spanish Super Cup.

Monday August 14

ENGLAND: Southampton owner Katharina Liebherr sells 80 per ➤

Late show...Lazio celebrate victory

Africa

MARK GLEESON

Ban on Sudanese teams causes chaos

CAF disqualifies three clubs – but then lets one back in

The group stage of the two African club competitions was thrown into disarray on the weekend of the final round of games after FIFA suspended Sudan and its three entrants – with El Hilal El Obeid later being reinstated.

Al Hilal and Al Merrikh forfeited their final games in the Champions League – although both were partly responsible for their plight as they took an active role in the struggle for control of the Sudan Football Association (SFA) that led to the suspension, albeit on opposite sides of a battle for power.

The FIFA ban was a result of the Sudanese government's attempts to remove SFA president Muatasim Gafer and came just days before Al Hilal were due to host Ferroviario Beira of Mozambique and Al Merreikh were away to Etoile Sahel, with both Sudanese clubs having a chance to advance to the last eight.

The government wanted to replace Gafer with former Al Hilal chairman Abdel Rahman Al Khatem, who is said to be a good friend of the country's president, Omar Al Bashir. When Gafer and his allies did not pitch for an election called in April, their rivals proclaimed themselves duly elected and called in the police to force the old faction out of the FA's headquarters.

FIFA had previously stated that no elections should go ahead until late 2017 and armed men "storming" the SFA offices was the last straw. After sending an emissary to Khartoum to try to resolve the impasse, FIFA imposed a ban on Sudan taking part in international and continental club competitions.

There was widespread anger among fans at the political shenanigans that cost the clubs their places in CAF's Champions League and Confederation Cup tournaments, and a quick about-face followed, with Gafer, who is a pharmacist by trade, restored to his old post – but not before the country's top two clubs said goodbye to their chances of competing in the knockout stage of the Champions League.

On the pitch, the major casualty of the Champions League group phase were last year's runners-up Zamalek, who failed to beat Al Ahli Tripoli of Libya at home and finished third in their group.

Defending champions Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa finished second in their group and will play the first leg of their quarter-final against Wydad at home. However, they are probably pleased as Esperance of Tunisia, who finished top, now face record winners Al Ahly of Egypt.

Al Ahly will be without coach Hossam El Badry for the first leg as he serves a suspension for not fulfilling television-interview obligations. He walked out of a post-match press conference when a BeIN Sports microphone was placed in front of him but was persuaded to return and spoke while covering the microphone of the Qatari-owned channel. He also refused to talk directly to their reporter in what was presumably the latest diplomatic spat between Qatar and, among others, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The third Sudanese side involved, El Hilal El Obeid, had already qualified for the quarter-finals of the Confederation Cup before the ban was put in place. So, although initially disqualified and unable to play their final game, when the ban was lifted they were reinstated in the knockout stage.

They now face holders TP Mazembe of the Democratic Republic of Congo, who needed a goal seven minutes from the end of their last group game to avoid elimination. WS

CAF Champions League: quarter-finals

Al Ahli Tripoli *(Lby)* v Etoile du Sahel *(Tun)*
Al Ahly *(Egy)* v Esperance *(Tun)*
Ferroviario Beira *(Moz)* v USM Alger *(Alg)*
Mamelodi Sundowns *(SAf)* v Wydad *(Mor)*

CAF Confederation Cup: quarter-finals

MC Alger *(Alg)* v Club Africain *(Tun)*
SuperSport Utd *(SAf)* v ZESCO United *(Zam)*
FUS Rabat *(Mor)* v CS Sfaxien *(Tun)*
El Hilal El Obeid *(Sud)* v TP Mazembe *(DRC)*

(both competitions: first leg Sep15-17 second leg Sep 22-24)

Shock...Zamalek (in white) failed to beat Al Ahli Tripoli

cent of the club to Chinese businessman Gao Jisheng.
SPAIN: Cristiano Ronaldo receives a one-match ban for his sending off in Real Madrid's Super Cup game on Sunday, plus a further four games for pushing the referee in the back after his dismissal.
USA: It is announced that Las Vegas will have the third and final expansion team in the second-tier USL next year, with Nashville SC and Fresno FC also joining.

Tuesday August 15

EGYPT: After a goalless 90 minutes, Al Ahly come from behind in extra time to beat Al Masry 2-1 in the Egyptian Cup Final.
GERMANY: Hoffenheim's European debut ends in a 2-1 loss at home to Liverpool in the first leg of their Champions League play-off game.
IRAN: Reports that Masoud Shojaei and Ehsan Haji Safi were banned from representing the national team, after playing for Panionis of Greece against Israel's Maccabi Tel Aviv in the Europa League, are denied by the Iranian FA.
JAPAN: Urawa Red Diamonds beat Brazil's Chapecoense 1-0 in a game between the winners of the J.League Cup and the Sudamericana Cup.
USA: New York Red Bulls will face Sporting Kansas City in the US Open Cup Final on September 20 after beating Cincinnati 3-2 in extra time.

Wednesday August 16

SPAIN: Real Madrid beat Barcelona 2-0 at the Bernabeu to claim the Super Cup 5-1 on aggregate.

Thursday August 17

ITALY: Milan thrash Macedonia's Shkendija 6-0 in the Europa League qualifiers – their biggest victory in Europe for 24 years.
MEXICO: Eintracht Frankfurt midfielder Marco Fabian will miss Mexico's four remaining World Cup qualifiers after agreeing to undergo back surgery later this month that will rule him out for a year.
SOMALIA: Osman Jama Diraa, an Executive Committee member of the Somali Football Federation, is shot dead in the capital, Mogadishu.

Friday August 18

ENGLAND: Liverpool reject a third bid from Barcelona for Philippe Coutinho, which is believed to be in the region of £114m.
FINLAND: Pertti Alaja, president of the Football Association of Finland and an ex-international goalkeeper, passes away, aged ➤

MADAGASCAR

STEVE MENARY

Island boosted by Nations Cup expansion

But domestic game still has no proper league

Football in Madagascar barely registered until this March, when the head of the Malagasy association succeeded in deposing the long-standing CAF president, Issa Hayatou.

After ending Hayatou's 27-year reign, former government minister Ahmad – who goes by a single name – pushed through a raft of controversial changes, notably expanding the African Nations Cup finals from 16 to 24 teams. However, the game on his home island is also crying out for reform.

Madagascar does not have a national league. Instead, 22 regional leagues send 24 teams into what is known as the Champions League, which follows a tournament format.

"The competition is too divided all over the country, so there is not one competition for the best teams who compete in one division like in the European countries," says Bob Kootwijk, the Dutch coach of leading club side Fosa Juniors.

The first round of the Malagasy Champions League kicks off in September with four groups of six teams. Three sides from each group qualify for a second round, featuring two groups of six, which sends four teams into a final group, to be decided by November.

Last year's final round featured Fosa Juniors, ASSM Elgeco Plus, Zanak'Ala and CNaPS – who also happen to be the only clubs that employ full-time players.

ASSM Elgeco Plus and Zanak'Ala are independent clubs, but Fosa and CNaPS benefit from being owned by companies. The Flexknit manufacturing group owns Fosa and CNaPS, winners of the last four titles, are owned by an insurance group of the same name.

"They are the richest and most influential club in Madagascar," adds Kootwijk, who was recruited by Flexknit's Dutch owner Arno Steenkist.

CNaPS are able to dominate in part because the club's owners directly employ their players, who then spend most of their time playing football.

"The advantage for the players is that after they stop playing football, they still have a job," explains Mirado Rakotoharimalala, marketing manager at the Federation Malagasy de Football (FMF).

Competition... CNaPS (yellow) take on Gor Mahia of Kenya

Full-time... CAaPS coach Rabeharisua Harimanitra

Photo: Stafford Ondego

Photo: Stafford Ondego

Power...CAF president Ahmad

For clubs without backers, such as Elgeco Plus and Zanak'Ala, maintaining a full-time squad is difficult.

Ticket prices are decided by the league or the FMF and cost between 1,000 to 3,000 Malagasy Ariary, which is between $0.30 to $0.90.

While the national team attracts crowds of 35,000 to the Stade Municipal de Mahamasina in Antananarivo, club attendances are far smaller, particularly in the centre of the island.

At their home in Mahajanga on the north-west coast, Fosa can attract crowds of up to 2,500 and attendances rise to between 6,000 and 10,000 for a game in the final round of the domestic Champions League.

With little sponsorship, wages are low. Players can get as little as $30 a month, while full-time players earn from $150 a month but no more than $400.

There is little overseas influence, with Kootwijk the only foreign coach at a leading club. And there are few overseas players, although Nigeria's Samson Kilani at Elgeco Plus is one of the most popular.

Kootwijk says: "The football is on a lower level than in Europe because they are less tactical. But they're technical skilled, and physically they are more than good.

"They need to start on a younger age with good training on a tactical level with better coaches."

Fosa has five teams but, like the rest of the island's clubs, they have enjoyed little success in CAF club competitions – and Kootwijk believes that a national league would help.

> **"The competition is too divided all over the country, so there is not one competition for the best teams who compete in one division"**
>
> Fosa Juniors coach Bob Kootwijk on Madagascar's domestic game

"The biggest obstacles are the structure of the federation," continues Kootwijk. "The organisation is not good. They have less money."

In response, Rakotoharimalala bemoans "the lack of state contribution, the lack of sponsorship, the lack of sport investment in Madagascar". He says: "The FMF almost does everything alone, and without FIFA – and CAF – subvention, football in Madagascar may die."

Madagascar has never qualified for a major international tournament, but Ahmad's expansion of the Nations Cup, and moving it to the summer, ought to make reaching the 2019 finals easier for a national side who, under new French coach Nicolas Dupois, began the qualifiers with a 3-1 win in Sudan.

"The group is very talented at the moment, but I think it is a bridge too far at the moment," says Kootwijk.

For the sake of the island's beleaguered club game, Dupois and the FMF will hope the Dutchman is wrong. WS

65, after a serious illness.

FRANCE: Monaco set a new Ligue 1 record, beating Metz 1-0 to make it 15 league wins in a row.

Saturday August 19

ITALY: Gianluigi Buffon saves Serie A's first VAR-awarded penalty as Juventus beat Cagliari 3-0.

ROMANIA: With the last kick of the game, George Calintaru chips his "Panenka" penalty into the arms of Florin Nita in the sixth minute of injury time as minnows Juventus Bucharest lose 2-1 to city giants FCSB, formerly known as Steaua.

Sunday August 20

ENGLAND: Tottenham Hotspur's first league game at their temporary Wembley home ends in a 2-1 defeat by Chelsea.

SPAIN: Barcelona make a winning start to their Liga campaign, beating Real Betis 2-0 on an emotional night at Camp Nou, with the club playing for the first time since a terror attack in the city on Thursday.

Monday August 21

ENGLAND: Wayne Rooney is on target for Everton in their 1-1 draw at Manchester City and becomes only the second player, after Alan Shearer, to score 200 Premier League goals.

Tuesday August 22

CHINA: Hulk scores for a seventh consecutive AFC Champions League game as Shanghai SIPG beat Chinese Super League rivals Guangzhou Evergrande 4-0 in the first leg of their quarter-final.

EGYPT: Clubs will now be allowed to sign four foreign players – an increase from the three previously permitted – plus two further players from Syria or Palestine.

RUSSIA: Fancy Bears, a group of Hackers from Russia, release documents that claim 25 players, including Carlos Tevez and Dirk Kuyt used banned medicines during the 2010 World Cup and that 160 footballers failed drugs tests in 2015.

Wednesday August 23

AZERBAIJAN: Qarabag lose 2-1 to Copenhagen in Denmark to draw 2-2 on aggregate and go through on away goals, becoming the first Azerbaijani side to reach the group stage of the Champions League.

CAMEROON: FIFA sets up a "normalisation committee" to run the country's football federation due to internal wrangles.

ENGLAND: Wayne Rooney turns ➤

Austria

BRIAN HOMEWOOD

Salzburg fail yet again in qualifiers

Red Bull side miss out on Champions League group stage

Austrian media branded it "*La Decima*", while Germany's *Kicker* compared the team to Sisyphus, who in Greek mythology was forced to push a boulder up a hill, only for it to roll back and hit him – an action he repeated for eternity.

For the 10th time in a row – and all since Red Bull became involved in the club in one guise or another – Salzburg were knocked out of the Champions League in the qualifying stage.

This time elimination came in the third round against Rijeka, who last season ended Dinamo Zagreb's run of 11 successive Croatian league titles.

After being held 1-1 at home in the first leg, Salzburg could only manage a goalless draw in the return and went out on away goals – to the endless amusement of the rest of Austria. Salzburg had two goals disallowed for offside: the first correctly, the second wrongly as the referee failed to notice a Rijeka defender on the goal line who was clearly playing Reinhold Yabo onside when he put the ball in the net. But they won little sympathy in a country where supporters loathe the way in which Salzburg have used Red Bull's financial muscle to win eight titles in the last 11 seasons.

Red Bull's disdain for tradition also alienated the public, in particular the unceremonious ditching of old Austria Salzburg's purple strip for Red Bull's corporate red and white. "I can't play with a purple bull if the brand is called Red Bull," said owner Dietrich Mateschitz at the time.

Red Bull did offer a compromise for the fans: the keeper would wear purple socks for away games. It seemed deliberately provocative and a large number of fans deserted and formed a breakaway club, who are now in the third tier.

There has been a bit of everything among those 10 failures, ranging from the abject humiliation of an away-goal loss to Luxemburg's Dudelange in 2012 to last year's agony against Dinamo Zagreb when they were three minutes away from qualifying.

Then there was the apparent injustice of 2013, when they were eliminated by Fenerbahce, who had been banned from European competition for two seasons over a domestic match-fixing scandal but were re-admitted pending an appeal. Fener won 3-1 on aggregate but their appeal to be admitted was rejected a month later.

New boss...Marco Rose

But 2014 was probably the most disappointing – the year when it seemed impossible not to qualify.

Having wrapped up the domestic title the previous season with eight games to spare, scoring 110 goals and finishing the 36-match campaign with a goal difference of plus 75, their play-off tie against Malmo was seemingly straightforward, given that no Swedish team had reached the group stage for 14 years. Salzburg led 2-0 in the home leg and were in total control. They also hit the post three times and let a host of other chances go begging before a defensive mix-up allowed Malmo to sneak an away goal in the last minute.

Suddenly it all began to go wrong. Senegalese winger Sadio Mane was dropped from the return leg in a dispute over a transfer, coach Adi Hutter had to reshuffle his defence and his players could not cope with the pressure and Malmo won the return 3-0.

Just for good measure, they also eliminated Salzburg the following year, overturning a two-goal deficit from the first leg to win 3-2.

Other recent failures have come against Valencia, Shakhtar Donetsk and Israel's Maccabi Haifa and Hapoel Tel Aviv.

For all their domestic success, Salzburg have been remarkably unstable. Eleven coaches have been employed in the Red Bull era: Kurt Jara, Giovanni Trapatonni, Co Adriaanse, Huub Stevens, Ricardo Moniz, Roger Schmidt, Adi Hutter, Peter Zeidler, Thomas Letsch, Oscar Garcia and now Marco Rose, who took over when Garcia accepted an offer from St Etienne. Only Schmidt lasted two full seasons.

Beaten...Rijeka (in white) bring Salzburg down to earth

Philosophies have switched between developing young Austria talent, signing experienced Austrian players, signing young foreign talent and signing expensive foreign talent. The current emphasis is on developing young players and quickly selling them on, and as these transfers usually happen in the summer it means they regularly lose some of their best players just before playing their most important games of the season.

In the future, Salzburg's path to the group stage will be even harder with UEFA cutting the number of group-stage places allocated to teams from outside the top 10 leagues from seven to four. WS

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ROUND-UP

Ajax, losing finalists in last season's Europa League, failed to negotiate the Champions League qualifiers for the third season running after they lost on away goals to Nice.

The Dutch side, who had drawn the first leg in France 1-1, suffered an early set-back in Amsterdam when Arnaud Souquet scored from close range after just three minutes.

They recovered with goals from Donny Van de Beek and Davinson Sanchez on either side of half-time, but Nice grabbed a valuable equaliser when Vincent Marcel turned in a wonderful back-heeled assist from midfielder Jean Seri.

Swiss league runners-up Young Boys pulled off the upset of the third qualifying round when they overcame Dynamo Kiev.

The Swiss, who lost the first leg 3-1, went through after a 2-0 win in Kiev. Guillaume Hoarau's 12th-minute penalty put them back in contention and Jordan Lotomba scored a minute from time to secure victory on away goals.

Other casualties in the third qualifying round included Club Brugge, who lost 5-3 on aggregate to Istanbul Basaksehir, for whom Emmanuel Adebayor scored.

Polish champions Legia Warsaw lost to Celtic while Norway's Rosenborg were beaten by Astana of Kazakhstan and Serb champions Partizan went out to Olympiakos.

➤ down an invitation to be included in England's squad for next month's World Cup qualifiers against Malta and Slovakia and retires from international football.

SPAIN: The City Football Group, who are Manchester City's parent company, and a group owned by City manager Pep Guardiola's brother Pere each buy an equal majority stake in La Liga side Girona, who have five players on loan from the Premier League club.

UKRAINE: Dynamo Kiev say they will not play Sunday's league game at Mariupol due to safety concerns. The city has hosted three games this season but is only 40km from where intermittent ceasefire violations have occurred between Ukrainian and pro-Russian forces.

Thursday August 24

EUROPA LEAGUE: Ajax – who reached last season's Final – and Fenerbahce miss out on the group stage, going out to Rosenborg and Vardar respectively.

Friday August 25

SPAIN: David Villa of New York City receives his first call up for Spain since the 2014 World Cup.

Denied...Thailand keep out Malaysia

UEFA: Cristiano Ronaldo is voted UEFA's Player of the Season for the third time in four years.

Saturday August 26

ENGLAND: With a 2-0 victory over Leicester City, Manchester United remain the only side with a 100 per recent record in the Premier League this season.

GERMANY: Robert Lewandowski scores twice in the last 20 minutes as Bayern Munich beat Werder Bremen 2-0.

ITALY: Paulo Dybala scores a hat-trick as Juventus come from 2-0 down to win 4-2 at Genoa. They lead Serie A with Internazionale, who are 3-1 winners at Roma.

SCOTLAND: With Celtic being held 1-1 at home by St Johnstone, Aberdeen go top with a 4-3 win at Partick Thistle.

SPAIN: Lionel Messi misses a penalty but then scores twice as Barcelona win 2-0 at Alaves and join Real Sociedad at the top of La Liga with maximum points.

Sunday August 27

ENGLAND: Liverpool beat Arsenal 4-0 at Anfield.

FRANCE: Monaco thrash Marseille 6-1 to join Paris Saint-Germain at the top of Ligue 1 with four wins from four games.

SPAIN: Real Madrid are held to a 2-2 draw at home by Valencia.

Monday August 28

ENGLAND: Liverpool agree to pay Naby Keita's £48m release clause and will sign RB Leipzig's midfielder in July 2018.

SPAIN: Ousmane Dembele becomes the second-most expensive signing ever as Barcelona pay Borussia Dortmund €105m for the 20-year-old French striker.

Tuesday August 29

IRAN: Masoud Shojae, who was captain of the national side for their last World Cup game, is left out of the Iran squad for the final qualifiers against South Korea and Syria.

GERMANY: A man suspected of targeting the Borussia Dortmund team bus in an April nail-bomb attack when it was en route to the Champions League quarter-final tie at home to Monaco is charged with 28 counts of attempted murder by German prosecutors.

THAILAND: Defending champions Thailand retain the men's Southeast Asian Games title with a 1-0 win over Malaysia in the Final as keeper Haziq Nadzli punched a corner into his own net.

Wednesday August 30

BOLIVIA: The Court of Arbitration for Sport dismisses Bolivia's appeal against forfeiting two World Cup games. In September, they beat Peru 2-0 and drew 0-0 with Chile but were later handed 3-0 defeats in both games after they fielded Paraguay-born Nelson Cabrera, who was ruled ineligible. WS

Club football

EUROPE

UEFA SUPER CUP

Aug 8 - Skopje, Macedonia
Real Madrid (Spa) 2 (Casemiro 24, Isco 52)
Manchester United (Eng) 1 (Lukaku 62)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 30,421. **Ref:** Rocchi (Ita)
Real Madrid: Navas - Carvajal, Varane, Sergio Ramos, Marcelo, Modric, Casemiro, Kroos, Bale (Marco Asensio 74), Benzema (Cristiano Ronaldo 83), Isco (Lucas Vazquez 74).
Manchester United: De Gea - Valencia, Lindelof, Smalling, Darmian, Ander Herrera (Fellaini 56), Matic, Pogba, Mkhitaryan, Lukaku, Lingard (Rashford 46).

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

3rd qualifying round

(teams with asterisk entered at this stage)
1st legs - Jul 25/26; 2nd legs - Aug1/2
AEK Athens* (Gre) v CSKA Moscow* (Rus) 0-2, 0-1 (agg 0-3); Astana (Kaz) v Legia Warsaw (Pol) 3-1, 0-1 (agg 3-2); Celtic (Sco) v Rosenborg (Nor) 0-0, 1-0 (agg 1-0); Club Brugge* (Blg) v Basaksehir* (Tur) 3-3, 0-2 (agg 3-5); Dynamo Kiev* (Ukr) v Young Boys* (Swi) 3-1, 0-2 (agg 3-3, Young Boys on away goals); FCSB* (Rom) v Viktoria Plzen* (CzR) 2-2, 4-1 (agg 6-3); Hapoel Beer Sheva (Isr) v Ludogorets (Bul) 2-0, 1-3 (agg 3-3, Hapoel Beer Sheva on away goals); Maribor (Sln) v FH (Ice) 1-0, 1-0 (agg 2-0); Nice* (Fra) v Ajax* (Hol) 1-1, 2-2 (agg 3-3, Nice on away goals); Partizan Belgrade (Ser) v Olympiakos* (Gre) 1-3, 2-2 (agg 3-5); Qarabag (Aze) v Sheriff (Mol) 0-0, 2-1 (agg 2-1); Salzburg (Aut) v Rijeka (Cro) 1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1, Rijeka on away goals); Slavia Prague* (CzR) v BATE Borisov (Bls) 1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2, Slavia Prague on away goals); Vardar Skopje (Mac) v Copenhagen (Den) 1-0, 1-4 (agg 2-4); Viitorul* (Rom) v APOEL Nicosia (Cyp) 1-0, 0-4 (aet) (agg 1-4)

● *The losing teams entered the Europa League in the final qualifying round*

Final qualifying round

(teams with country abbreviation entered at this stage)
1st legs - Aug15/16; 2nd legs - Aug 22/23
APOEL Nicosia v Slavia Prague 2-0, 0-0 (agg 2-0); Basaksehir v Sevilla (Spa) 1-2, 2-2 (agg 3-4); Celtic v Astana 5-0, 3-4 (agg 8-4); Hapoel Beer Sheva v Maribor 2-1, 0-1 (agg 2-2, Maribor on away goals); Hoffenheim (Ger) v Liverpool (Eng) 1-2, 2-4 (agg 3-6); Napoli (Ita) v Nice 2-0, 2-0 (agg 4-0); Olympiakos v Rijeka 2-1, 1-0 (agg 3-1); Qarabag v Copenhagen 1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2, Qarabag on away goals); Sporting Lisbon (Por) v FCSB 0-0, 5-1 (agg 5-1); Young Boys v CSKA Moscow 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3)

● *The winning teams have qualified for the group stage; the losing teams enter the Europa League at the group stage*

EUROPA LEAGUE

3rd qualifying round

(teams with asterisk entered at this stage)
1st legs - Jul 27; 2nd legs - Aug 2/3
Aberdeen (Sco) v Apollon Limassol (Cyp) 2-1, 0-2 (agg 2-3); AEK Larnaca (Cyp) v Dinamo Minsk (Bls) 2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1); AIK (Swe) v Sporting Braga* (Por) 1-1, 1-2 (aet) (agg 2-3); Arka Gdynia* (Pol) v Midtjylland (Den) 3-2, 1-2 (agg 4-4, Midtjylland on away goals); Astra (Rom) v Oleksandria* (Ukr) 0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1); Austria Vienna* (Aut) v AEL Limassol (Cyp) 0-0, 2-1 (agg 2-1); Bnei Yehuda (Isr) v Zenit St Petersburg* (Rus) 0-2, 1-0 (agg 1-2); Bordeaux* (Fra) v Videoton (Hun) 2-1, 0-1 (agg 2-2, Videoton on away goals); Botev Plovdiv (Bul) v Maritimo* (Por) 0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2); Brondby (Den) v Hajduk Split (Cro) 0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2); Dinamo Bucharest* (Rom) v Athletic Bilbao* (Spa) 1-1, 0-3 (agg 1-4); Dinamo Zagreb* (Cro) v Odd (Nor) 2-1, 0-0 (agg 2-1); Everton* (Eng) v Ruzomberok (Slk) 1-0, 1-0 (agg 2-0); Freiburg* (Ger) v Domzale (Sln) 1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2); Gent* (Blg) v Altach (Aut) 1-1, 1-3 (agg 2-4); Krasnodar* (Rus) v Lyngby (Den) 2-1, 3-1 (agg 5-2); Maccabi Tel Aviv (Isr) v Panionios (Gre) 1-0, 1-0 (agg 2-0); Marseille* (Fra) v Oostende* (Blg) 4-2, 0-0 (agg 4-2); Mlada Boleslav (CzR) v Skenderbeu (Alb) 2-1, 1-2 (aet) (agg 3-3, Skenderbeu 4-2 on pens); Olimpik Donetsk* (Ukr) v PAOK Salonika* (Gre) 1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3); Ostersund (Swe) v Fola Esch (Lux) 1-0, 2-1 (agg 3-1); Panathinaikos* (Gre) v Qabala (Aze) 1-0, 2-1 (agg 3-1); PSV Eindhoven* (Hol) v Osijek (Cro) 0-1, 0-1 (agg 0-2); Red Star Belgrade (Ser) v Sparta Prague* (CzR) 2-0, 1-0 (agg 3-0); Sturm Graz (Aut) v Fenerbahce* (Tur) 1-2, 1-1 (agg 2-3); Suduva (Lit) v Sion* (Swi) 3-0, 1-1 (agg 4-1); Trakai (Lit) v Shkendija (Mac) 2-1, 0-3 (agg 2-4); Universitatea Craiova* (Rom) v Milan* (Ita) 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3); Utrecht (Hol) v Lech Poznan (Pol) 0-0, 2-2 (agg 2-2, Utrecht on away goals)

Final qualifying round

(teams with country abbreviation entered at this stage, from the Champions League)
1st legs - Aug16/17; 2nd legs - Aug 24
Ajax (Hol) v Rosenborg (Nor) 0-1, 2-3 (agg 2-4); Altach v Maccabi Tel Aviv 0-1, 2-2 (agg 2-3); Apollon Limassol v Midtjylland 3-2, 1-1 (agg 4-3); BATE Borisov (Bls) v Oleksandria 1-1, 2-1 (agg 3-2); Club Brugge (Blg) v AEK Athens (Gre) 0-0, 0-3 (agg 0-3); Dinamo Zagreb v Skenderbeu 1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1, Skenderbeu on away goals); Domzale v Marseille 1-1, 0-3 (agg 1-4); Everton v Hajduk Split 2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1); FH (Ice) v Sporting Braga 1-2, 2-3 (agg 3-5); Krasnodar v Red Star Belgrade 3-2, 1-2 (agg 4-4, Red Star Belgrade on away goals); Legia Warsaw (Pol) v Sheriff (Mol) 1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1, Sheriff on away goals); Ludogorets (Bul) v Suduva 2-0, 0-0 (agg 2-0); Maritimo v Dynamo Kiev (Ukr) 0-0, 1-3 (agg 1-3); Milan v Shkendija 6-0, 1-0 (agg 7-0); Osijek v Austria Vienna 1-2, 1-0 (agg 2-2, Austria Vienna on away goals); Panathinaikos v Athletic Bilbao 2-3, 0-1 (agg 2-4); PAOK Salonika v Ostersund 3-1, 0-2 (agg 3-3, Ostersund on away goals); Partizan Belgrade (Ser) v Videoton 0-0, 4-0 (agg 4-0); Utrecht v Zenit St Petersburg 1-0, 0-2 (aet) (agg 1-2); Vardar Skopje (Mac) v Fenerbahce 2-0, 2-1 (agg 4-1); Viitorul (Rom) v Salzburg (Aut) 1-3, 0-4 (agg 1-7); Viktoria Plzen (CzR) v AEK Larnaca 3-1, 0-0 (agg 3-1)

● *The winning teams have qualified for the group stage*

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

1st knockout round (last 16)

1st legs - Jul 4-6; 2nd legs - Aug 8-10
Atletico Paranaense (Bra) v Santos (Bra) 2-3, 0-1 (agg 2-4); Barcelona (Ecu) v Palmeiras (Bra) 1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, Barcelona 5-4 on pens); Emelec (Ecu) v San Lorenzo (Arg) 0-1, 1-0 (agg 1-1, San Lorenzo 5-4 on pens); Godoy Cruz (Arg) v Gremio (Bra) 0-1, 1-2 (agg 1-3); Guarani (Par) v River Plate (Arg) 0-2, 1-1 (agg 1-3); Jorge Wilstermann (Bol) v Atletico Mineiro (Bra) 1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0); Nacional (Uru) v Botafogo (Bra) 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3); The Strongest (Bol) v Lanus (Arg) 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)

Quarter-finals draw

Barcelona v Santos; Botafogo v Gremio; Jorge Wilstermann v River Plate; San Lorenzo v Lanus
1st legs - Sep13/14; 2nd legs - Sep 20/21

SUDAMERICANA CUP

2nd round

(teams marked with asterisk entered at this stage, from the Libertadores Cup)
1st legs - Jun 27-Jul13; 2nd legs - Jul 25-Aug 9
Bolivar (Bol) v LDU Quito (Ecu) 1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, LDU Quito 6-5 on pens); Cerro Porteno (Par) v Boston River (Uru) 2-1, 4-1 (agg 6-2); Defensa y Justicia (Arg) v Chapecoense* (Bra) 1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, Chapecoense 4-2 on pens); Deportivo Cali (Col) v Junior* (Col) 1-1, 1-1 (agg 2-2, Junior 3-2 on pens); Fluminense (Bra) v Universidad Catolica (Ecu) 4-0, 2-1 (agg 6-1); Fuerza Amarilla (Ecu) v Santa Fe* (Col) 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2); Huracan (Arg) v Libertad* (Par) 1-5, 0-2 (agg 1-7); Independiente (Arg) v Deportes Iquique* (Chl) 4-2, 2-1 (agg 6-3); Nacional (Par) v Olimpia* (Par) 1-1, 2-2 (agg 3-3, Nacional on away goals); Nacional Potosi (Bol) v Estudiantes* (Arg) 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3); Oriente Petrolero (Bol) v Atletico Tucuman* (Arg) 2-3, 0-3 (agg 2-6); Palestino (Chl) v Flamengo* (Bra) 2-5, 0-5 (agg 2-10); Patriotas (Col) v Corinthians (Bra) 1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3); Ponte Preta (Bra) v Sol de America (Par) 1-0, 3-1 (agg 4-1); Racing Club (Arg) v Independiente Medellin* (Col) 3-1, 3-2 (agg 6-3); Sport Recife (Bra) v Arsenal (Arg) 2-0, 1-2 (agg 3-2)

3rd round draw

Atletico Tucuman v Independiente; Cerro Porteno v Junior; Chapecoense v Flamengo; Corinthians v Racing Club; Fluminense v LDU Quito; Libertad v Santa Fe; Nacional (Par) v Estudiantes; Sport Recife v Ponte Preta
1st legs - Aug 22-Sep14; 2nd legs - Sep12-21

AFRICA

BURKINA FASO

2016-17 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
RC Kadiogo (C)	30	16	11	3	46	21	59
Etoile Filante	30	14	12	4	29	15	54
Rahimo	30	13	8	9	30	22	47
Forces Armees	30	12	10	8	33	22	46
Police	30	10	13	7	32	27	43
AJEB	30	10	11	9	29	28	41
ASF Bobo	30	9	14	7	22	24	41
Majestic	30	9	13	8	23	29	40
US Ouagad'ou	30	9	10	11	27	23	37
Sonabel	30	9	10	11	25	24	37
ASFA Yen'ga	30	11	4	15	28	35	37
RC Bobo	30	8	11	11	25	26	35
Comoe	30	7	10	13	16	28	31
Santos	30	6	12	12	16	29	30
Boul'kou (R)	30	7	9	14	12	28	30
KOZAF (R)	30	5	12	13	20	32	27

DR CONGO

2016-17 – CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFFS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
TP Maz'mbe (C)	14	10	3	1	27	8	33
AS Vita	14	9	3	2	20	7	30
Motema P'be	14	8	3	3	27	12	27
Don Bosco	14	5	3	6	23	19	18
Sanga Balende	14	5	3	6	13	17	18
Renaiss'ce (R)[1]	14	4	3	7	13	24	15
Muungano	14	1	5	8	3	21	8
Bukavu Dawa	14	0	5	9	5	23	5

[1]Relegated to Kinshasa regional league because of crowd trouble

GABON

2016-17 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mounana (C)	25	19	3	3	49	18	60
Mangasport	25	19	1	5	49	13	58
Pelican	25	11	9	5	35	18	42
CMS	25	12	5	8	24	22	41
Akanda	25	11	7	7	36	24	40
Missile	25	10	3	12	30	33	33
Lozo Sport	25	8	6	11	30	36	30
Std Mandji	25	7	8	10	25	30	29
US Bitam	25	6	10	9	27	30	28
Std Migoveen	25	6	9	10	25	38	27
Adouma	25	6	6	13	16	29	24
Olympique	25	7	3	15	18	40	24
Port-G'til[1] (R)	13	4	3	6	9	19	15
FC105 (R)	25	1	11	13	21	44	14

[1]Port-Gentil excluded from league after failing to show up for 2 games; all results from 2nd half of season annulled

GUINEA-BISSAU

2016-17 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
SB Benfica (C)	26	19	5	2	58	18	62
Nuno Tristao	26	13	10	3	22	10	49
SC Bafata	26	12	7	7	32	20	43
Cuntum	26	12	7	7	36	29	43
UDIB	26	9	7	10	35	32	34
Pelundo	26	8	9	9	31	27	33
Portos[1]	25	8	9	8	27	31	33
Lagartos[1]	24	8	9	7	32	37	33
Os Balantas	26	7	11	8	27	28	32
Canchungo	26	7	9	10	26	29	30
Sporting GB	26	8	3	15	18	36	27
Tigres (R)	26	7	6	13	29	34	27
Mavegro[1] (R)	24	7	2	15	21	37	23
Estrela C'z[1] (R)	25	3	8	14	22	48	17

[1]Remaining game(s) not played

LIBERIA

2016-17 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
LISCR (C)	22	10	12	0	30	12	42
Barrack YC	22	11	6	5	34	14	39
Fassell	22	12	1	9	35	24	37
MC Breweries	22	10	6	6	22	19	36
Nimba Utd	22	9	8	5	30	21	35
Watanga	22	10	5	7	22	16	35
Jubilee	22	8	6	8	20	24	30
Keitrace	22	6	11	5	28	28	29
Mighty Bar'lle	22	7	3	12	24	30	24
LPRC Oilers (R)	22	5	7	10	13	18	22
Invincible XI (R)	22	4	3	15	22	45	15
ELWA Utd (R)	22	2	8	12	16	45	14

NIGER

2016-17 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FAN (C)	26	15	7	4	47	21	52
US GN	26	15	1	10	36	24	46
Douanes	26	13	5	8	46	26	44
GNN	26	11	7	8	38	19	40
Police	26	10	9	7	30	29	39
Sahel	26	9	9	8	30	29	36
Olympic	26	9	9	8	22	26	36
Sonidep	26	8	11	7	22	20	35
Nigelec	26	9	8	9	19	25	35
Urana	26	8	9	9	15	18	33
Jangorzo	26	8	6	12	31	37	30
Akokana	26	7	8	11	24	26	29
Racing B'koki[1]	26	4	12	10	19	33	24
Tagour (R)	26	5	1	20	17	63	16

[1]Stay in top division after winning rel/prom play-off

SOMALIA

2016-17 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dekedda (C)	18	11	6	1	40	11	39
Banadir	18	10	4	4	33	14	34
Elman	18	9	5	4	38	14	32
Heegan	18	9	5	4	26	17	32
Horseed	18	7	8	3	20	16	29
Jeenyo Utd	18	6	4	8	30	25	26
Gaadiidka	18	6	6	6	40	20	24
Waxool	18	3	3	12	14	40	12
Bariga D'xe (R)	18	3	2	13	10	48	11
Mogadi'u U (R)	18	2	1	15	12	58	7

ZANZIBAR

2016-17 – CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFFS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
JKU (C)	14	10	3	1	26	9	33
Zimamoto	14	8	4	2	31	10	28
Jang'ombe B	14	8	3	3	20	8	27
Jamhuri	14	7	3	4	27	18	24
Kizimbani	14	5	1	8	15	38	16
Taifa Jang'ombe	14	3	3	8	15	24	12
Okapi	14	2	4	8	15	32	10
Mwenge	14	2	1	11	21	31	7

CONCACAF

CONCACAF LEAGUE

1st round

1st legs - Aug1-3; 2nd legs - Aug 8-10
Aguila (ESv) v Real Esteli (Nic) 1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, Aguila 4-3 on pens); Central (T&T) v Arabe Unido (Pan) 1-2, 0-3 (agg 1-5); Chorrillo (Pan) v Honduras Progreso (Hnd) 1-0, 1-0 (agg 2-0); Olimpia (Hnd) v Alajuelense (CR) 2-0, 1-0 (agg 3-0); Platense (Hnd) v Alianza (ESv) 1-2, 1-2 (agg 2-4); Portmore United (Jam) v Plaza Amador (Pan) 1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, Plaza Amador 5-4 on pens); Santos de Guapiles (CR) v San Juan Jabloteh (T&T) 6-2, 2-1 (agg 8-3); Walter Ferretti (Nic) v Belmopan Bandits (Blz) 4-1, 1-0 (agg 5-1)

Quarter-finals

1st legs - Aug15-17; 2nd legs - Aug 22-24
Aguila v Arabe Unido 0-2, 1-0 (agg 1-2); Alianza v Olimpia 1-0, 1-3 (agg 2-3); Chorrillo v Santos de Guapiles 0-1, 0-1 (agg 0-2); Walter Ferretti v Plaza Amador 0-0, 1-2 (agg 1-2)

● *The tournament winner will qualify for the 2018 CONCACAF Champions League*

PUERTO RICO

2017 Championship Final

Jun 30: GPS Puerto Rico 2 Bayamon 1.

ASIA

IRAQ

2016-17 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Quwa Jaw'a (C)	36	23	12	1	59	23	81
Al Naft	36	22	11	3	61	17	77
Al Shorta	36	21	12	3	55	26	75
Al Zawra'a	36	21	9	6	67	28	72
Naft Al Wasat	36	19	11	6	45	26	68
Al Mina'a	36	18	12	6	40	24	66
Al Talaba	36	14	12	10	51	38	54
Baghdad SC	36	12	15	9	26	21	51
Al Najaf	36	12	13	11	41	38	49
Naft Al Janoob	36	8	15	13	36	42	39
Naft Maysan	36	8	15	13	28	36	39
Al Hudod	36	8	14	14	35	46	38
Al Kahrabaa	36	8	14	14	24	36	38
Al Bahri	36	9	8	19	42	63	35
Karbala'a	36	6	15	15	24	46	33
Zakho	36	2	18	16	18	51	24
Al Hussein	36	3	14	19	23	52	23
Al Samawa (R)	36	3	13	20	26	47	22
Al Karkh (R)	36	3	11	22	24	65	20
Erbil[1] (R)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

[1] *Withdrew after12 games; results annulled*

LAOS

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lao Toyota (C)	14	12	1	1	48	12	37
Lao Police	14	9	2	3	33	16	29
NUOL	14	9	1	4	20	15	28
DK	14	6	2	6	19	27	20
TIP Savan	14	5	2	7	23	27	17
Savan United	14	4	2	8	19	26	14
Vientiane Utd	14	3	1	10	21	39	10
Champasak U	14	1	3	10	17	38	6

SYRIA

2016-17 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Jaish (C)	30	18	11	1	39	16	65
Tishreen	30	18	10	2	45	22	64
Al Wahda	30	15	11	4	51	26	56
Al Ittihad	30	12	13	5	42	28	49
Hutteen	30	11	10	9	32	36	43
Al Muhafaza	30	10	9	11	37	37	39
Al Shorta	30	10	9	11	33	34	39
Al Taliya	30	9	11	10	30	32	38
Al Majd	30	9	11	10	27	30	38
Nawair	30	9	10	11	35	38	37
Al Karama	30	7	13	10	23	25	34
Al Wathba	30	7	12	11	24	32	33
Jableh (R)	30	6	13	11	21	28	31
Al Fotuwa (R)	30	7	9	14	28	38	30
Al Jazeera (R)	30	4	10	16	28	44	22
Al Horriya (R)	30	5	4	21	29	58	19

OCEANIA

FIJI

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lautoka (C)	14	13	1	0	35	6	40
Ba	14	9	1	4	32	12	28
Suva	14	8	0	6	25	15	24
Labasa	14	7	3	4	23	13	24
Rewa	14	6	3	5	20	20	21
Nadi	14	5	2	7	16	19	17
Dreketi	14	2	1	11	8	35	7
Rakiraki (R)	14	0	1	13	6	45	1

VANUATU (Port Vila Premier League)

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ifira B Bird (C)	14	9	4	1	27	11	31
Erakor GS	14	8	6	0	30	12	30
Tupuji Imere	14	7	4	3	25	20	25
Amicale	14	6	5	3	22	21	23
Tafea	14	3	5	6	20	17	14
Mauwia	14	3	5	6	14	19	14
Siaraga	14	2	3	9	14	32	9
Mauriki (R)	14	2	0	12	12	32	6

The top 4 then entered a knockout competition, the winner of which (see below) takes one of Vanuatu's 2018 Oceania Champions League places

2017 Top 4 Tournament Final

Jul 8: Ifira Black Bird 0 Erakor Golden Star 2.

Internationals

HERO TRI-NATION TOURNAMENT

Played in Mumbai, India

Aug19
India 2 (R Singh 37, B Singh 62)
Mauritius 1 (Jocelyn 15)
HT: 1-1

Aug 22
St Kitts & Nevis 1 (Rogers 87)
Mauritius 1 (Sarah 19)
HT: 0-1

Aug 24
India 1 (J Singh 38)
St Kitts & Nevis 1 (Amory 75)
HT: 1-0

HERO TRI-NATION TOURNAMENT – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
India	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
St Kitts & N	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Mauritius	2	0	1	1	2	3	1

FRIENDLIES

Friday, July 28
Jul 28 - Honiara
Solomon Islands 0
Vanuatu 0

Wednesday, August 16
Aug16 - Burton upon Trent, England
Andorra 0
Qatar 1 (Assadalla 73)
HT: 0-0

Tuesday, August 22
Aug 22 - Krubong
Malaysia 1 (Lok pen 90+4)
Syria 2 (Al Marmour 81, Muhtadi 84)
HT: 0-0

Wednesday, August 23
Aug 23 - Doha
Qatar 2 (Al Haidos 18, pen 65)
Turkmenistan 1 (Hojayev 67)
HT: 1-0

Thursday, August 24
Aug 24 - Port of Spain
Trinidad & Tobago 1 (Villaroel 11)
Jamaica 2 (Hardware 6, Reid 57)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 4,000. **Ref:** Johnson (Guy)

Friday, August 25
Aug 25 - Tashkent
Uzbekistan 5 (Rashidov 9, Sergeev 43, Mirzayev 84, Masharipov 90+2, Geynrikh 90+4)
Kyrgyzstan 0
HT: 2-0

UNDER-17 WORLD CUP

To be played in India

Group stage schedule

Group A
Oct 6: Colombia v Ghana; India v USA.
Oct 9: Ghana v USA; India v Colombia.
Oct 12: Ghana v India; USA v Colombia.

Group B
Oct 6: New Zealand v Turkey; Paraguay v Mali.
Oct 9: Turkey v Mali; Paraguay v New Zealand.
Oct 12: Mali v New Zealand; Turkey v Paraguay.

Group C
Oct 7: Germany v Costa Rica: Iran v Guinea.
Oct 10: Costa Rica v Guinea; Iran v Germany.
Oct 13: Costa Rica v Iran; Guinea v Germany.

Group D
Oct 7: Brazil v Spain; North Korea v Niger.
Oct 10: Spain v Niger; North Korea v Brazil.
Oct 13: Niger v Brazil; Spain v North Korea.

Group E
Oct 8: New Caledonia v France; Honduras v Japan.
Oct 11: France v Japan; Honduras v New Caledonia.
Oct 14: France v Honduras; Japan v New Caledonia.

Group F
Oct 8: Chile v England; Iraq v Mexico.
Oct 11: England v Mexico; Iraq v Chile.
Oct 14: Mexico v Chile; England v Iraq.

● *Top 2 in each group and the 4 3rd-placed teams with the best record qualify for1st knockout round (last16)*

WOMEN'S EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP

Played in Holland

Group A
Jul 16: Holland 1 Norway 0; Denmark 1 Belgium 0.
Jul 20: Norway 0 Belgium 2; Holland 1 Denmark 0.
Jul 24: Norway 0 Denmark 1; Belgium 1 Holland 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Holland (Q)	3	3	0	0	4	1	9
Denmark (Q)	3	2	0	1	2	1	6
Belgium	3	1	0	2	3	3	3
Norway	3	0	0	3	0	4	0

Group B
Jul 17: Italy 1 Russia 2; Germany 0 Sweden 0.
Jul 21: Sweden 2 Russia 0; Germany 2 Italy 1.
Jul 25: Sweden 2 Italy 3; Russia 0 Germany 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany (Q)	3	2	1	0	4	1	7
Sweden (Q)	3	1	1	1	4	3	4
Russia	3	1	0	2	2	5	3
Italy	3	1	0	2	5	6	3

Group C
Jul 18: Austria 1 Switzerland 0; France 1 Iceland 0.
Jul 22: Iceland 1 Switzerland 2; France 1 Austria 1.
Jul 26: Iceland 0 Austria 3; Switzerland 1 France 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Austria (Q)	3	2	1	0	5	1	7
France (Q)	3	1	2	0	3	2	5
Switzerland	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Iceland	3	0	0	3	1	6	0

Group D
Jul 19: Spain 2 Portugal 0; England 6 Scotland 0.
Jul 23: Scotland 1 Portugal 2; England 2 Spain 0.
Jul 27: Scotland 1 Spain 0; Portugal 1 England 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England (Q)	3	3	0	0	10	1	9
Spain (Q)	3	1	0	2	2	3	3
Scotland	3	1	0	2	2	8	3
Portugal	3	1	0	2	3	5	3

● *Top 2 in each group qualified for quarter-finals*

Quarter-finals

Jul 29: Holland 2 Sweden 0.
Jul 30: Germany 1 Denmark 2; Austria 0 Spain 0 (aet, Austria 5-3 on pens); England 1 France 0.

Semi-finals

Aug 3: Denmark 0 Austria 0 (aet, Denmark 3-0 on pens); Holland 3 England 0.

Final

Aug 6 - Enschede
Holland 4 (Miedema 10, 89, Martens 28, Spitse 51)
Denmark 2 (Nadim pen 6, Harder 33)
HT: 2-2. **Att:** 28,182. **Ref:** Staubli (Swi)
Holland: Van Veenendaal - Van Es (Van den Berg 90+4), Van der Gragt, Dekker, Spitse, Van de Donk, Van Lunteren (Janssen 57), Martens, Groenen, Van de Sanden (Jansen 90), Miedema.
Denmark: Petersen - Sandvej, Nielsen, S Sorensen (Roddik Hansen 77), Kildemoes (Thogersen 61), Troelsgaard, Veje, Sofie Pedersen (Christiansen 82), Nadim, Harder, Larsen.

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions
(R) = relegated
(Q) = qualified for next stage

September 2017 Vol 58 No 1

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Thanks this issue to
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Periodicals paid at Rahway, NJ Postmaster: send address changes to *World Soccer*, c/o MAIL America, 365 Blair Road, Avenel NJ 07001, USA. USPS004075

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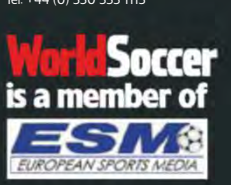

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World Soccer's GREAT MATCHES

JUNE 15, 2008, GENEVA: EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP

Turkey 3 Czech Republic 2

Fatih Terim's Turkey score three times in the final quarter of an hour to claim a place in the last eight of the Euros

Crazy...Turkey celebrate their winning goal

With both sides on equal points and with identical goal differences after their first two games, this was a winner-takes-all meeting to decide who would go through to the Euro 2008 knockout stage with Portugal.

If the scores were level after 90 minutes, penalties would be required, but that looked academic as the Czech Republic took a two-goal lead. However, as Lyndon Radnedge explained: "Turkey marched into the quarter-finals after amazingly coming back from 2-0 down against the Czech Republic with three goals in the last 15 minutes.

"Fatih Terim's side showed impressive creative discipline during their remarkable turnaround but were also helped by a horrible blunder by Petr Cech"

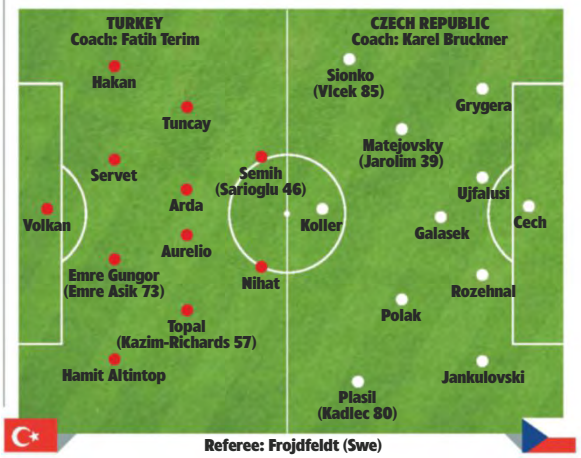
The mistake by Cech was decisive. With his side leading 2-1, and with just three minutes of normal time left to play, the keeper should have had no trouble in collecting a cross from Hamit Altintop. But he inexplicably dropped the ball at the feet of Nihat Kahveci, who prodded home an equaliser.

In the closing seconds, Nihat got on the end of another Altintop cross – albeit somewhat more spectacularly this time – and fired home a winner.

Fumble...Petr Cech

Turkey would score another late, late goal as they went on to beat Croatia on penalties in the quarter-finals, but they then conceded in the last minute and lost 3-2 to Germany in the semi-finals.

As Gavin Hamilton wrote at the end of the competition: "One of the great stories of the tournament. Fearless and unstinting, the Turks won friends with their never-say-die attitude." WS



Referee: Frojdfeldt (Swe)

KEY MOMENTS

Opener...Jan Koller (no9) heads home

34min Zdenek Grygera breaks down the right flank and crosses for Jan Koller to head home. **0-1**

62min Libor Sionko's cross on a Czech counter-attack is met by Jaroslav Plasil. **0-2**

71min Jan Polak hits a post following another Sionko cross. He manages to get to the rebound, but Volkan Demirel saves his tame follow-up header.

75min Hamit Altintop cuts in from the right flank and his cross evades everyone before Arda Turan scores at the far post. **1-2**

82min Servet Cetin misses a great chance to equalise when he meets a deep cross three yards from goal but cannot direct his header into the net.

87min An Altintop cross is fumbled by Petr Cech and the ball drops at the feet of Nihat Kahveci, who taps in. **2-2**

89min Altintop provides another cross for Nihat, who curls a shot in off the bar. **3-2**

90+2min Volkan is sent off for pushing Koller to the floor in the penalty area after the ball goes out for a goal kick. ■

Pouncing...Nihat Kahveci equalises

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